

Climate Companions

**Civic Pedagogies by Design
and Critical Spatial Practice**

Andrew Belfield

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2025



Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

**Climate Companions:
Civic Pedagogies by Design and Critical Spatial Practice**

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Doctoral Thesis

The University of Sheffield
Faculty of Social Sciences
School of Architecture and Landscape

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Abstract

'Climate Companions' was a two-year, practice-based, Participatory Action Research (PAR) in Poplar, East London. The research explored the potential of design-driven civic pedagogies in nurturing agency toward more resilient urban futures. It asked the questions: Which design tools, learning methods and spaces enable transformative civic learning?

Civic Pedagogies seek to realise civic action through projects of emancipatory learning occurring at the edges and outside our academic institutions. This co-inquiry aimed to extend theories and practices in this field by utilising co-design to collaboratively shape two civic pedagogies (2022-2023). These were nested within the R-Urban Poplar eco-civic hub, an urban common and part of a network of ecological hubs supporting circularity and civic resilience in cities (Petrescu and Petcou, 2020).

Several findings are relevant for future spatial practitioners, educators, and designers. Firstly, the learning that took place was situated (Haraway, 1988) and embodied (Gustafson, 1999); we learned 'by-doing', 'from place', and 'through togetherness'. In this case, the role of R-Urban as a designed space of civic learning was integral, creating an informal civic classroom through 'demonstration' and by curating a caring, inclusive, and diverse pedagogy.

Co-design was catalytic in opening up R-Urban to new members and supported participants in taking on new roles. This process supports the ‘achievement of agency’ (Biesta and Tedder, 2007) by acquiring new skills, valorising situated knowledges, and teaching peers. This agency has transformative potential to move beyond the self towards broader civic interests, which is reflected in the reproduction of the R-Urban hub and through neighbourhood action. Civic pedagogies provide citizens with the know-how, and capabilities for transformative action in the places they live.

Key Words: Civic Pedagogy, Practice-based research, Participatory Action Research, Co-design, Design-driven Civic Learning, Critical Spatial Practice, R-Urban

Table of Contents

Part 01 - Contextualising and Situating

(P. 13-119)

Chapter 1.0 - Introduction

P. 14-29

1.1 Why Civic Learning?	P. 14
1.2 Transformative Potential of Civic Learning	P. 16
1.3 Introducing Civic Pedagogies in Critical Spatial Practice	P. 17
1.4 Gaps in Knowledge	P. 19
1.5 Aims of the Study	P. 20
1.6 Positionality and Approach	P. 21
1.7 Research Questions and Objectives	P. 22
1.8 Thesis structure	P. 25

Chapter 2.0 - Grounding Civic Pedagogies

P. 30-65

2.1 Emergent Practice	P. 30
2.2 Situated Knowledge(s) and Learning	P. 32
2.3 Critical learning	P. 34
2.4 Agency	P. 36
2.5 The Spaces of Civic Pedagogies	P. 39
2.6 The Methods and Practices of Civic Learning	P. 43
2.6.1 Building Solidarities and Forming Alliances	P. 44
2.6.2 Embodied Learning	P. 45
2.6.3 Shaped with Care	P. 46
2.6.4 Mediated Through Design	P. 48
2.7 Case Study – Climate Care 2019 – 2021	P. 51
2.7.1 Case Study Research	P. 51
2.7.2 Urban Laboratory to Natureculture Site	P. 52
2.7.3 Climate Care, Transversal Learning	P. 55
2.7.4 Three Lessons from Berlin	P. 60
2.7.5 Concluding Climate Care	P. 62
2.8 Concepts for Civic Pedagogies	P. 64

Chapter 3.0 - Situating the Design Practice

P. 66-93

3.1 public worker	P. 66
3.2 Situated Design Practice	P. 72
3.3 Rooting in Poplar	P. 76

3.4 Poplar's Post-War History	P. 76
3.5 Multiple East Ends	P. 78
3.6 Teviot Today	P. 79
3.7 R-Urban (in) Poplar	P. 82
3.8 R-Urban, Resilience and the Ecological Transition	P. 82
3.9 R-Urban Poplar Eco-Civic Hub	P. 86
3.10 Infrastructures and Prototypes	P. 86
3.11 Diverse Economies	P. 89
3.12 Hub for Civic Learning	P. 90
3.13 Climate Learning	P. 92

Chapter 4.0 - Positionality and Methodology **P. 94-117**

4.1 Practice-Based Research	P. 94
4.2 Grounded	P. 96
4.3 Doing Activism	P. 97
4.4 Participatory	P. 99
4.5 Methods	P. 101
4.5.1 Co-Learning and Auto-ethnographic Tools	P. 101
4.5.2 Co-Design	P. 103
4.5.3 Qualitative Interviewing	P. 105
4.5.4 Portfolio and Data Analysis	P.106
4.6 Ethics	P. 110
4.7 Positionality	P.111
4.8 Research Design: Climate Companions 2022-24	P.113
4.11 Moving Forward	P.115

Part 02 - Practice Portfolio ***(P. 120-319)***

i. R-Urban 2017-22	P. 126-149
ii. Climate Companions 2022	P. 150-213
iii. Co-Designing Learning	P. 215-231
iv. Climate Companions 2023	P. 232-289
v. R-Urban and the Neighbourhood 2023-24	P. 290-319

Part 03 - Extending Theories and Practices

(P. 320-460)

Chapter 5.0 - Learning

P. 323-347

5.1 Chapter Overview	P. 323
5.2 Modes of Learning during Climate Companions (CC)	P. 323
5.3 Mode 1 – Learning by Doing	P. 325
5.3.1 Hands-on Skill Based Learning	P. 326
5.3.2 ‘Doing’ Collectively	P. 328
5.3.3 Reconnecting by (Doing)	P. 330
5.3.4 Situated and Embodied Doing: Learning, Un-learning and Re-Learning	P. 332
5.4 Mode 2 – Learning from Place	P. 333
5.4.1 Walking and Sensing the Neighbourhood	P. 334
5.4.2 Learning from the Neighbourhood Micro-climate	P. 336
5.4.3 Exploring the Hidden ‘Universe’ Under Your Feet	P. 339
5.5 Mode 3 – Learning through Togetherness	P. 341
5.5.1 Performing Togetherness	P. 341
5.5.2 Companionships, Alliances, and Solidarities through ‘Togetherness’	P. 344
5.6 Chapter Conclusion	P. 346

Chapter 6.0 - Spaces

P. 348-371

6.1 Chapter Overview	P. 348
6.2 Spaces of Civic Learning	P. 348
6.3 A Space of ‘Demonstration’	P. 349
6.4 A Space of Openness and ‘Freedom’	P. 355
6.5 A Space of Care and Inclusion	P. 362
6.6 Discussion on the Designed Spaces of Civic Learning	P. 365
6.6.1 Demonstrating Civic Values by Commoning Space	P. 365
6.6.2 Informal Spaces of Care and Inclusion	P. 366
6.7 Chapter Conclusion	P. 369

Chapter 7.0 - Design

P. 372-388

7.1 Chapter Overview	P. 372
7.2 Co-Design Aim and Context	P. 372
7.3 Co-Design Tools for Climate Companions	P. 374
7.3.1 Assembling a Community of Practice	P. 374
7.3.2 Co-Mapping Needs, Desires and Relations	P. 377

7.4 Design Roles	P. 381
7.4.1 Design-researcher – Initiating, Mediating and Facilitating	P. 381
7.4.2 Design-educator: Co-curating Learning Processes	P. 384
7.4.3 Co-Learners, Inherent ‘Enthusiasm’ and Adopting New Roles	P. 385
7.5 Discussion on Co-Designing Pedagogies with Learners	P. 388
7.5.1 Co-Design Tools	P. 388
7.5.2 Roles of Design(ers)	P. 389
7.6 Chapter Conclusion	P. 391

Chapter 8.0 - Agency **P. 394-421**

8.1 Chapter Overview	P. 394
8.2 Peer Learning – Altering Habits of the Everyday	P. 395
8.3 The Empowering Nature of ‘Hosting’	P. 398
8.4 Expanding Relational Networks and Alliances	P. 401
8.5 Catalysing New Roles and Initiatives	P. 410
8.6 Discussion on the Agency of Civic Learning	P. 414
8.6.1 Nurturing the Capability to Act	P. 414
8.6.2 Agency through Peer-Teaching	P. 417
8.6.3 The Hub Enables Civic Agency	P. 418
8.6.4 Civic Agency Transforms the Hub (and the Neighbourhood)	P. 419
8.7 Chapter Conclusion	P. 420

Chapter 9.0 - Thesis Conclusion + Contributions **P. 422-435**

9.1 Thesis Overview and Findings	P. 422
9.2 Contextualising and Situating	P. 423
9.3 Practice Portfolio: Climate Companions	P. 424
9.4 Extending Theories and Practices	P. 424
9.5 New Contributions to Knowledge	P. 430
9.6 Limitations of the Study	P. 432
9.7 Recommendations for Future Research and Civic Pedagogues	P. 434

References **P. 437-453**

List of Illustrations + Data Availability **P. 454-461**

Appendix **P. 462-469**

Part 01

Contextualising and Situating

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Why Civic Learning?

The enduring study of learning is a reflection that it is something we all do, a commonality integral to existence. But in what settings do we learn best? What methods support learners in acquiring knowledge effectively and developing the capabilities to use it in everyday life? These are typical questions asked by pedagogues throughout history and across disciplines, always in pursuit of transformed learning practices that are more equitable and empowering for participants. This thesis is a contribution to both theory and practice of design-based pedagogies, focussing on a particular niche within spatial practice, civic pedagogies.

Civic pedagogies sit within the socio-material turn in learning theory. Their origins can be traced to Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (1916/2018), in highlighting the role of experience and self-reflection in processes of learning. Psychologist Lev Vygotskiĭ (1978/1997) developed thinking around a 'Zone of Proximal Development' which recognises social condition, rather than solely cognitive function, to shape our abilities to engage in the world. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) defined the situated character of learning, by using the ways in which craftspeople learn through 'legitimate peripheral participation' within a community of practice. This lineage combines with radical forms of education, where critical pedagogies are the vehicle for social liberation, by engaging with lived oppressions (Freire, 1970/1996), or by turning learning on its head in the academy to challenge hegemonic structures in a process of emancipatory 'freedom' (hooks, 1994; Giroux, 2010). It is within this rich history of radical conceptions of learning that I situate this study.

Learning, as I argue in Chapter 2, is inherently linked to the 'achievement of agency' (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2015). When conditions and settings permit, processes of active learning can nurture the production of agency in subjects. Agency is not a static concept, we hold agency in some scenarios and not others, but through learning we can develop capabilities and capacities to act in the lived-world.

My motivation for undertaking this research stems from my personal educational experience and the gradual development of my own agency through it. Whilst studying for a Masters in Architecture at the Royal College of Art, along with 12 other course mates in ADS3, we embarked unknowingly on our own emancipatory learning process, 'The Wembley Civic University'¹. Under the guidance of our tutors Andreas Lang, Torange Khonsari and Francesco Sebreghondi, we began a yearlong residency in a dis-used parking garage next to an overlooked part of Wembley high street. This base became our field office and 'university', a space from which we could engage Wembley residents and stakeholders in collectively envisaging sustainable futures for the neighbourhood. Our 'university' questioned hierarchies of knowledge, framing citizens as experts, architecture-students as facilitators, tutors as support network, to work collaboratively to identify challenges, problems, opportunities for this small pocket of London. It was an attempt to re-think what educational institutions might be and what understanding their 'civic' duties to place could enable. The student group became hosts inviting experts from disciplines beyond architecture to talk and share radical ideas (e.g., local currencies, community land trusts, urban commons). It became a space in which we got to know and work with citizens, valorising their experience and knowledge of the city. It was, on a personal level, deeply transformative for my practice of architecture. Altering the way in which I saw the profession, it gave insight into a critical way of practising, centring civic rather than only professional voices in city making. Ultimately it gave me the confidence, tools and experience to act. It started a journey towards this research and gave me a sense of what agency I personally had as a critical spatial practitioner.

¹ At the Royal College of Art, design studios (ADS) are organised as vertical studios (year 4 and 5). Each studio has a lead tutor who sets an agenda, in this case, 'Architecture and Activism'. Following a 'live' project opportunity to work in collaboration with Brent council urban planning team the studio group 'moved' our studio to Wembley.

1.2 Transformative Potential of Civic Learning

This formative experience shows the transformative potential of civic pedagogies, in their ability to nurture and develop skills, knowledge and understanding that can support citizens in the positive transformation of the city. Civic learning helps to empower us to act within our lived world, to be active citizens in its transformation to more equitable and just societies. Henri Lefebvre (1968) famously articulated the social dimension of the production of space and in *Writing on Cities* developed the notion of a 'Right to the City'. His rallying call for a radical democratic re-imagining of the urban condition through praxis, recognising the political struggle to control the production of urban space beyond our existing capitalist structures (Purcell, 2013, p. 322). Marxist geographer David Harvey (2012) argues that understanding the urban condition, in both its oppressive and liberatory structures, is central to renegotiating how we want to live in the future as a society (p.66). I would add that emancipatory forms of learning and un-learning, in which structural oppressions are revealed and knowledge co-created to overcome them are a central part of this democratic project. This thesis is concerned with forms of learning which take place outside our traditional institutional framing (schools, universities, accredited courses), without disciplinary restriction, focussing on learning oriented towards preparing citizens for this political struggle.

The pedagogic experience focuses on the cultivation of situated knowledge(s), by experiencing and sense making through place and by developing the requisite skills to enable this political project. In the same way in which we learn any craft, citizens must also learn how they contribute to the transformation of urban and social conditions through their everyday life. In summarising the impact of Eco-Nomadic School, Doina Petrescu (2018) outlines the political nature of civic pedagogies and what it means to Learn to Act:

The school, and taking part in the school, is a political act, which promotes civic responsibility on a local and trans-local level. Learning as part of the school is a form of empowerment for existing groups to start (and continue) diverse practices, where social, ecological and economical concerns meet and merge. Learning to Act is ultimately about how to gain agency. (p.318)

If we are to address the multiple urgencies² of our time we must first ‘learn to act’, to gain agency over our contexts as part of a wider justice struggle for planet and society. Civic learning, I argue, is integral to this transformation.

1.3 Introducing Civic Pedagogies in Critical Spatial Practice

Despite civic learning having applicability across a range of disciplines and community settings, this thesis focuses on civic pedagogies within the field of architecture, more specifically within critical spatial practice (CSP). Jane Rendell (2016) defined this term as ‘modes of self-reflective artistic and architectural practice which seek to question and to transform the social conditions of the sites into which they intervene’ (2016, p.1). I understand CSP as part of the wider ‘critical turn’ in design and architecture, in defining a series of ‘alternate’ ways of practising outside the professional norm. The roots of this approach can be traced to the relational arts movement (Bourriaud 2002), which highlighted the artist’s role in creating more than static objects, but as a relational force for social production. This approach resonates with spatial thinkers and doers in diverse ways as documented by the ‘Spatial Agency’ web platform and book (Awan et al. 2011). Spatial agency drew together diverse examples of practising architecture ‘otherwise’, as a critical alternative to normative architectural practice in which the architect’s role is constrained to professional service delivery. In reviewing the diversity of approaches, they recognise the inherent ‘agency’ of the architect in transforming social and spatial conditions with others (2011), highlighting situated and participatory modes of practice with non-designers.

Rendell (2008) highlights the relational specificity of place and site to CSP. To be situated in a place means to be embedded within both its physical location and its communities (human and non-human). Simonsen et al. (2012) argue that

2 By ‘urgencies’ I’m broadly referring to the multiple compounding socio-ecological polycrises (Planetary climate change and global warming, bio-diversity and habitat loss and their intersecting social crises racism, health, structural inequalities etc)

situated design methods are always from this embedded position, grounding within a community of practice (pp.7-8). Elke Krasny (2015) focuses on a specific form of CSP termed 'urban curation', which she describes as a deeply situated relational practice with the aim of realising socio-spatial change. This focus on relationality, site and place in CSP helps to distinguish this approach from other design fields.

In some cases, an outcome of CSP can be the development of pedagogies which aim to transform the social conditions of place. Through artistic and creative methods, opportunities for incidental learning and consciousness-building become apparent. David Pinder (2008, p. 731) highlights the process-oriented nature of interventionist spatial practices as a pedagogy in itself, one that provides space to visualise alternative futures for places. This point is emphasised by Caris and Cowell (2016, p.479), whose study of Dutch artist Jeanne Van Heeswijk, recognised that her interventionist art practice raised critical consciousness in participants, through the disruption of the existing dominant order, without necessarily dictating what the alternative should be. Whilst interventionist approaches may inherently create pedagogic opportunities for civic learning by extension, this thesis is concerned with instrumentalised or 'designed' pedagogies, where the design of learning programmes is the primary aim. By looking more specifically at civic pedagogies within CSP, I more closely align with my existing design practice and narrow the focus of a PhD inquiry to address a specific research field. Equally, it is through such criticality that practitioners can meaningfully address the compounding socio-ecological urgencies.

Civic pedagogies have been deployed in a range of contexts, for example, architectural 'live-project' teaching (Morrow and Brown, 2012); re-thinking institutions as new civic infrastructures for learning (Kneiss et al. 2014; Talevi and Karjevsky, 2021); trans-local learning networks to nurture agency (Bohm, James and Petrescu, 2018); and in cases specifically for young adults and children in schooling environments (Antaki and Petrescu, 2023). Civic pedagogies have a broad applicability and no singular setting. In her study of Urban Studies Centres (1970-80s) in the UK, Sol Perez Martinez defined civic pedagogies as:

A situated learning approach that uses the environment as a resource to make people aware, skilled and prepared to take action over their surroundings, reinforcing a form of local active citizenship (Perez Martinez in Morrow, Mutschler and Waddell, 2020)

Her definition is a useful departure point, highlighting the situated and place-based methods of learning in the production of agency for spatial transformation. In exploring our existing practices as case studies, I worked alongside Nicola Antaki and Thomas Moore³, arguing that civic pedagogies produced ‘radical urban classrooms’ in which solidarities and ‘unusual alliances’ were formed through the educative experience (Antaki, Belfield and Moore, 2024). This definition, the modes of learning and their core characteristics are more fully unpacked in Chapter 2 – ‘Grounding Civic Pedagogies’, but to conclude this section, I’ll focus on articulating the research gap I intend to fill.

1.4 Gaps in Knowledge

Existing scholarship tends to focus on autoethnographies of design-researchers in critically evaluating previous work⁴, creating reflections on the role of co-design(ers) in mediating civic pedagogies (Antaki and Petrescu, 2023). Or scholarship looks to historic examples of radical urban education to explore its civic dimension (Perez Martinez, 2019; Tewdwr-Jones, Sookhoo and Freestone, 2020). Civic pedagogies often closely intersect with urban education experiences from the geographic disciplinary tradition, in foregrounding the role of space in the production of critical subjects (Gruenewald, 2003; Dobson, 2006). However, civic pedagogies can

3 Both members of the Lines of Flight Research Cluster (LoF) at the Sheffield School of Architecture. LoF is a network of PGR students supervised by Doina Petrescu, and the group has been active since the early 2000s. It is a brilliant and supportive network, a place to think and exchange knowledge during the uncertainties of following the PhD pathway. Many thanks to all who participated in the seminar, workshops, lectures and discussions we organised during my study.

4 As was the case in our article ‘Radical Urban Classrooms’ – In this journal article I reflected on my experience in organising the ‘School for Civic Action’ at the Tate Exchange in 2018-19.

be distinguished from this field in their imperative to cultivate agency for urban transformation. They also intersect with ‘live project’ teaching within architecture schools, reflecting primarily on the impact of civic settings and collaborations on student development (Harriss, Hyde and Marcaccio, 2020). At present, little scholarship exists that evaluates citizen perspectives and experiences of civic pedagogies in which they co-create, to fully understand their agential potential. Similarly, there is a limited body of work that examines the connection between civic pedagogies and processes of urban transformation, as well as the settings that either enable or inhibit them. This thesis sets out to contribute to this gap in knowledge, to answer this through the process of developing and testing civic pedagogies in the city I call home, London.

1.5 Aims of the Study

This thesis seeks to contribute to future civic pedagogies through action. Experiencing first hand (by co-designing civic pedagogies) the thesis aims to contribute to the theorisation of the field, by ‘extending theories’ through the practice of design (Markussen 2017). By collectively reflecting on an action-learning process, the thesis can re-inform and add to existing concepts used in civic learning.

The thesis aims to share insights, learnings and more specifically the methods, practices and spaces of civic pedagogies for future practitioners, developing knowledge with trans-local relevance to be tried and replicated in contexts beyond the site of this research.

Lastly, the research seeks to have a positive impact on the socio-material context of Poplar, East London. In the spirit of participatory and activist scholarship, the thesis aims to have a positive ‘impact’ on the communities (human and place) in which it is embedded.

1.6 Positionality and Approach

Before fully establishing the research questions and objectives I must first situate my epistemological position and approach. This section is more deeply articulated in Chapters 3 and 4, however this overview seeks to give clarity for how it can be interpreted.

Coming from Practice

My primary motivation for starting the PhD was a way of sustaining an existing practice⁵. It came from a reflection that my interests and passions spanned both the academy and practice of architecture, by operating between these two-worlds through participatory civic design work and live-project teaching. Finding ways that this practice could be supported through academia (being less precarious, retaining/developing criticality), in return providing rich contexts for research with real-world relevance.

My individual practice sits within membership of public works⁶, a critical design collective based in London who work between architecture, art and activism (public works, no date). In my case, practice is also an epistemological position, personally learning and understanding best ‘by-doing’. From experience it is often with time, space and after ‘the action’ that knowing becomes clear, in what could constitute Schön’s (1983) ‘reflective practitioner’. This has been further developed within the arts by Nelson (2013) who articulates creative practice ‘as research’ in its own right, a way of knowing through the tacit knowledge of practice-based inquiries. This thesis is an attempt to contribute to existing scholarship which defines itself as practice/design-based research. It seeks to contribute to the ‘know what, know how and know that’ of civic pedagogies, making sense through the practice.

5 At the time of application (2018-19)

6 I first joined public works as a student in 2014, working freelance during the summer break during my MA Architecture at the Royal College of Art. Following graduation in 2015, my and close friend Tom Dobson and I were approached by Torange Khonsari and Andreas Lang with an offer to join public works and use it as a platform to continue ‘Live project’ contexts in the world of practice. I’ve subsequently shaped all work through public works, becoming a Director in 2019.

Extending Theories and Practices – A participatory and grounded approach

Grounded Theory (GT) has been a strong influence on the research design, in this case a constructivist GT approach as defined by Kathy Charmaz (2017). It speaks to the co-creation of new knowledge through the back and forth of data gathering and analysis, in which understanding and meaning is derived from this dialogue with subjects (Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014). In this thesis, extensions to existing concepts and theories of civic pedagogies are shaped by this iterative approach, between data creation (action) and analysis. GT combines well with design/practice-based research, creating the conditions for the multiple roles and identities of the researcher. This thesis is an attempt to contribute to theorisation of the field through the ‘doing’ of practice, as Thomas Markussen (2017) elaborates, a way of extending theories rather than starting anew.

Ever since the first-hand experience of citizen-led neighbourhood planning in Wembley, participation has always been at the core of both research and practice. ‘Participation’ within the built environment is a somewhat jaded term, often deployed disingenuously by powerful stakeholders to placate or appease citizens with limited influence to change the built environment. My understanding of participation is in its political nature, in active citizenry, in retaining criticality to overcome hierarchy and address urban justice challenges (Blundell Jones, Petrescu and Till, 2005). This understanding has shaped my practice within public works, and equally governs the research design. This thesis brings together methodologies from activist-scholarship (Chatterton, Fuller and Routledge, 2007; Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010; Derickson and Routledge, 2015; Mayer, 2020) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Kesby, Kindon and Pain, 2007; McIntyre, 2014; Lawson, 2015) in shaping a critical approach. In essence, the thesis is an opportunity to co-create civic pedagogies in Poplar, co-producing research outcomes with participants, producing situated knowledge and informing new ways of practising as a spatial practitioner.

1.7 Research Questions and Objectives

The research is structured around 3 main questions with different objectives which relate to specific chapters:

RQ1: What are the core concepts for civic pedagogies in critical spatial practice, and how can they be researched?

Objectives RQ1:

The primary objective is to define Civic Pedagogies in relation to the field of critical spatial practice, outlining their distinguishing features from other radical pedagogies through a literature review and case analysis of Climate Care (2019-2021) (Chapter 2). This understanding will allow me to situate my design practice within public works (2015-2021) and develop the methodology and tools to be used in the fieldwork period (Chapters 3 and 4).

RQ2: Which design tools, learning methods and spaces enable transformative civic learning? And what are their distinct characteristics?

Objectives RQ2:

This objective is to answer RQ2 through practice (by-doing). Action-research becomes a vehicle to test the transformative potential of civic pedagogies. The primary objective is to co-create and test a new civic pedagogy in the research context of Poplar, East London. To record and document the methods of learning, their practices and the spaces which enable civic learning through a Practice Portfolio (Part 02). This serves as a collection of tools for future practice and forms the basis (data) for the analysis and discussion chapters (Chapters 5-7).

RQ3: To what extent can design-driven civic pedagogies enable greater agency in learners? In what ways does it contribute to socio-spatial transformation?

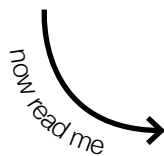
Objectives RQ3:

The principal objective for this final question is to critically evaluate the impact of the trial civic pedagogies in Poplar. This focuses on two aspects, first its impact on learners and participants (the production of agency), second, how civic agency supports wider socio-environmental urban transformations (Chapter 8 and Conclusion).

Part 01

Contextualising and Situating

- ☉ Chapter 1 - Introduction
- ☉ Chapter 2 - Grounding Civic Pedagogies
- ☉ Chapter 3 - Situating the Design Practice
- ☉ Chapter 4 - Positionality and Methodology



Practice Portfolio - Climate Companions

- ☉ Climate Companions Portfolio
- ☉ CC22 Film (Vimeo Link)
- ☉ CC23 Film (Vimeo Link)
- ☉ Autoethnographic journal

Part 02

Part 03

Extending Theories and Practices

- ☉ Chapter 5 - Learning
- ☉ Chapter 6 - Spaces
- ☉ Chapter 7 - Design
- ☉ Chapter 8 - Agency
- ☉ Chapter 9 - Thesis Conclusion



Figure 01 - Thesis Structure Diagram.
Source: Author (All remaining figures Authors unless otherwise stated)

1.8 Thesis structure

The framing of the thesis sits within the growing ‘PhD by Design Research’ and more specifically within what is often referred to as ‘Practice-Based PhD’ format. It is an approach that has developed within the arts and design-based disciplines, combining a portfolio of work which evidences the practice with a written body of work (Vaughan, 2017). In practice-based theses, Nelson (2014) summaries three main components; a product (in this case a civic pedagogy), a documentation of the process (a portfolio) and a ‘complimentary writing’ (this thesis), which situates the work within existing canons of practice and theory, before presenting outcomes or findings (p.26). In adopting this approach I’ve chosen to focus on a thesis which is split into three parts for clarity. (See figure 01)

Part 01 – ‘Contextualising and Situating’

This first part, Chapters 1-4, outline the existing theoretical and practical context for the research, situating my existing practice as a critical spatial practitioner working in Poplar through the R-Urban hub. Lastly it defines the scope, methodology and research design for a new design-based research project (Climate Companions 2022-23).

In Chapter 2 ‘**Grounding Civic Pedagogies**’ I conduct a literature review which grounds an emergent practice in theory and practice. I define core characteristics, by unpacking key concepts related to radical pedagogies in art and architecture, exploring the legacy of critical pedagogues, situated epistemologies, and situated learning. I proceed to explore agency from a theoretical perspective in learning and through forms of ‘collective agency’. Towards the end of chapter I focus on examples of civic pedagogies, the spaces they occupy, the networks and alliances they build, the transversal methods used for collective learning and their relation with design Wand critical spatial practices. The chapter concludes with a case study, ‘Climate

Care 2019-2021 at Floating University Berlin' which helps to situate a contemporary moment of practice. In summary, this chapter defines a series of core concepts which will inform the subsequent practice-based research through action.

Chapter 3 '**Situating the Design Practice**' explores my existing design practice, locating seven years of work as member of the critical design collective, public works. In exploring my relation to the collective, I discuss the situated and participative methods used and the wider framing of critical spatial practice. It then establishes the context of Poplar, the neighbourhood of study, and its social and physical histories. The chapter concludes by describing the specific project in which the research is embedded, R-Urban Poplar. Exploring the wider context of the R-Urban network and methodology, before outlining the infrastructures, economies and existing civic learning taking place within the hub. The chapter sets the context for this thesis and outlines the socio-material context for the civic pedagogies to respond to.

To conclude the first part, Chapter 4 '**Positionality and Methodology**' details the research design. It begins by outlining the positionality and methodological framing through practice-based research, it being a piece of activist scholarship that utilises Grounded Theory and Participatory Action Research approaches. I then outline the specific methods used in the inquiry; co-learning and autoethnographies, co-design of civic pedagogies and qualitative interviewing, including their ethical framing. The Chapter then details the research design for 'Climate Companions 2022-23', the specific focus of this practice-based research. Climate Companions (CC) describes the co-designed 'festivals of learning' that took place as part of the fieldwork, this concludes Part 01.

Part 02 – 'Practice Portfolio: Climate Companions'

To give insight into the practice-based research element (Climate Companions), what follows is a documentation of the process, aiming to give the reader the fullest sense of what actually happened in the co-creation of civic pedagogies. The portfolio first outlines the existing learning methods at R-Urban Poplar, before

recording the two learning programmes (2022 and 2023) and the co-design process which took place through this research. It then records further subsequent civic actions which took place beyond the moments of learning at R-Urban and within the neighbourhood. The portfolio uses photography, architectural drawing, mapping and autoethnographic reflections and can be viewed as a body of evidence for the subsequent discussion chapters. In producing the portfolio it produced a rich account of the experience, which was subsequently analysed and interpreted. In the back and forth between producing and interpreting data, extensions to theories and practices were produced as part of the thesis's 'Grounded Theory' approach.

This Portfolio document also includes two QR codes to watch a series of films which were produced by local filmmaker Nana Maolini, which record the learning activities during both curriculum moments and will give the reader a better sense of the atmosphere and content of the pedagogy. In addition, this data was triangulated with interview transcripts and a number of co-authored reports by public works in which I was a contributing author. This cumulative picture of the action research provides the data for the discussion chapters.

Part 03 – Extending Theories and Practices

The third part seeks to elaborate, extend and contribute to existing theories and practices of civic pedagogies, through analysis of the data produced. In total there are four discussions which address different themes, before a final summarising conclusion.

Chapter 5 '**Learning**' describes the three modes of learning within the pedagogies and the actions which unfolded, and analyses why these methods were effective/ineffective in this context. It focuses on the embodied and situated character of learning; by doing, from place, and through togetherness. It argues that the process supports the valorisation of situated knowledges and supports the raising of consciousness in learners within their everyday lives.

In Chapter 6 the thematic focus shifts to the **'Spaces'** of civic learning by analysing the unique spatiality of learning and the role of the R-Urban hub in facilitating and enabling the pedagogy. I argue that spatial 'informality and openness' contribute to the creation of convivial learning forums. This spatial generosity is mirrored by R-Urban Poplar's ability to care for, and care with, participants, which sets it apart from other normative learning environments. It argues that urban commons (such as R-Urban Poplar) make for productive learning environments for civic pedagogies.

Chapter 7 focuses on the role of **'Design'** and designers in the enabling civic learning in Poplar. It reflects on the use of co-design tools as a method for pedagogic programming, establishing learning needs and enabling R-Urban to become more porous, form new relations, build alliances and reach more stakeholders. This chapter proceeds to unpack the roles and responsibilities adopted during the Climate Companions programmes (from both an autoethnographic standpoint and learner perspective), it discusses what it means to co-learn together and how design roles evolved through the process.

In Chapter 8, attention turns to the **'Agency'** of co-designed civic learning. I argue that it helps to cultivate and nurture agency in individuals through understanding their 'capability to act', which constitutes agency as an 'achievement' through peer teaching. The chapter then proceeds to discuss the 'collective agency' formed through pedagogy and how this relational practice supports the ongoing reproduction of R-Urban Poplar, as well as wider neighbourhood transformation.

The Thesis then draws to a **'Conclusion'** in Chapter 9 in which I present the main findings of the study, the new contribution to knowledge, the limitations, and suggestions for future research.

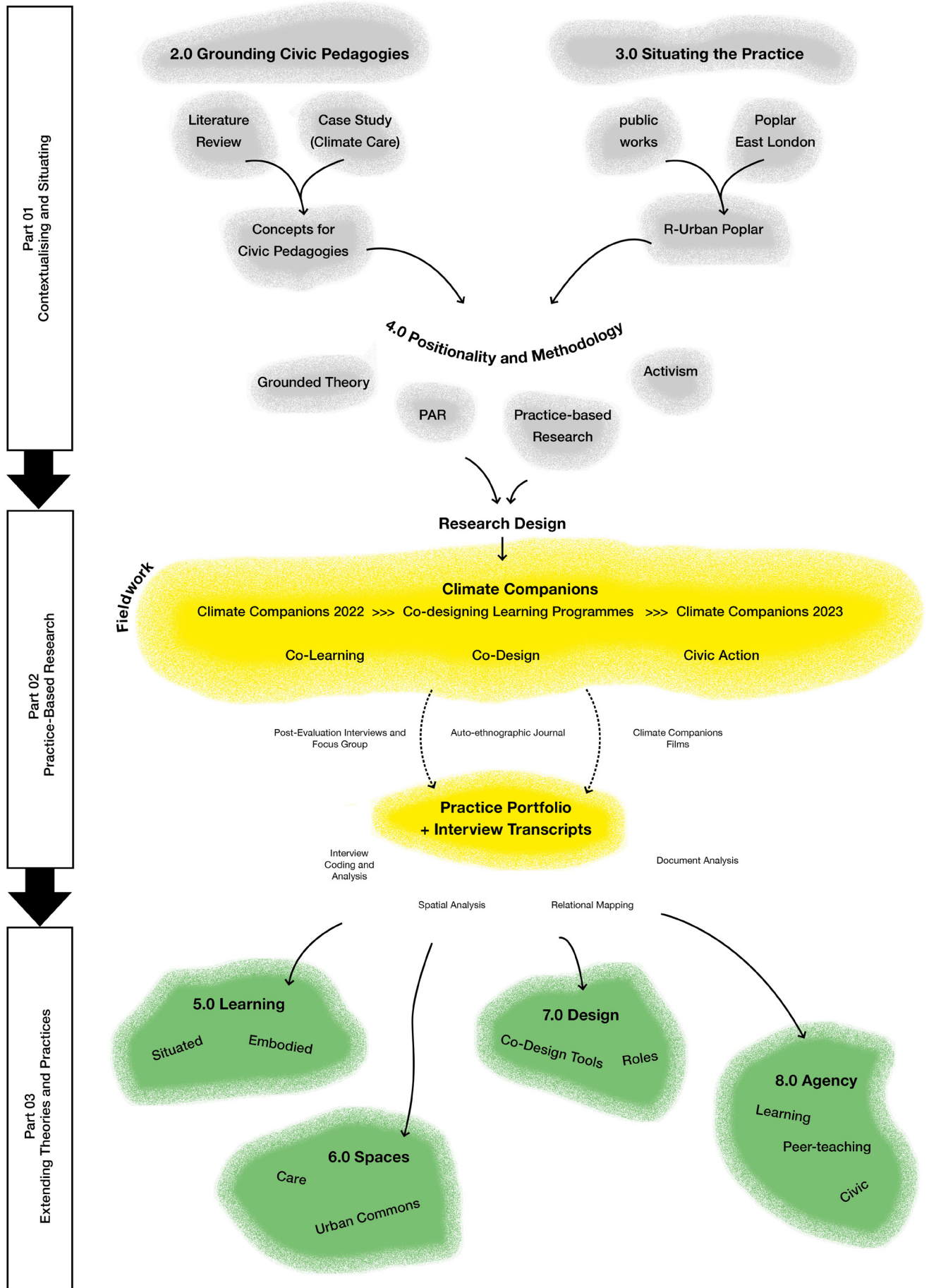


Figure 02 - Thesis Design Diagram.

2.0 Grounding Civic Pedagogies

2.1 Emergent Practice

Civic pedagogy is an emergent field of education, derived from critical pedagogy (Freire, 1974, 1996; Giroux, 2010), public pedagogy (Sandlin, O'Malley and Burdick, 2011; Biesta, 2012; Caris and Cowell, 2016) and urban education (Gruenewald, 2003; Dobson, 2006; Mcfarlane, 2011). They are rooted within the discipline of critical spatial practice (Rendell, 2016a), taking place in the borders of our existing education institutions and outside them through the critical re-imagining of learning through action (Awan, Schneider and Till, 2011). The aim of a civic pedagogy is to empower participants to take transformative action over their built environment, utilising the city as the site of learning (Perez Martinez in Morrow, Mutschler and Waddell, 2020, p. 196). Perez Martinez' (2020) definition offers a point of departure which I intend to build upon, exploring the key characteristics of civic pedagogies before unpacking an empirical case to further inform their practice.

Historically civic pedagogies have been embedded within specific arenas of civic learning. An example of this was Patrick Geddes' Outlook Tower (1892), which was an observatory, laboratory and museum to engage the citizens of Edinburgh in civic life (Tewdwr-Jones et al. 2020, 280). The legacy of Geddes' approach has been traced to Colin Ward and the proliferation of Urban Studies Centres in the 1970s UK (Perez Martinez, 2019). These urban learning forums were spaces embedded in local neighbourhoods with a focus on urban education to improve environmental literacy in citizens (Burke and Jones 2014). They continue at present with the revival of the Urban Room concept following the 2013 Farrell Review, with a growing network of Urban Rooms across the UK (Butterworth and Lawrence, 2018). These urban rooms typically bring together multiple stakeholders from existing educational institutions and local governments alongside grassroots groups and citizens with a focus on co-production and shared learning (Tewdwr-Jones et al, 2020). In all these examples, their aim is the transformation of the urban environment through the production of civic agency, enabled by creative, critical, and situated learning.

Other civic pedagogies critically examine and re-imagine our educational institutions as they seek to challenge embedded hierarchies within the academy

and propose alternative spaces and methods of civic learning. For example, the Floating University Berlin, Germany, was initially conceived as an ‘urban laboratory for collective learning’ (Floating Berlin, 2021, p.2). Its intention was to challenge the institutional typology of the University by focusing on the ecological, cultural and social values of place (Elarji and Michels, 2020, p. 3). The Eco-Nomadic School challenges the traditional idea of the school institution in creating a networked, decentralised, ‘trans-local pedagogy’ currently across France, UK and Romania (Bohm, James and Petrescu, 2018, p.8). A ‘trans-local pedagogy’ shares knowledge across geographies in diverse contexts, a form of solidarity-building between grassroots groups and activist practices in support of more ecological ways of living in the contemporary moment of crisis. More recent research has described the role of civic pedagogies within school environments in India, as extensions to existing curricula, engaging children in crafts, environmental awareness and consciousness raising via a deep engagement with the city as a classroom (Antaki, Belfield and Moore, 2024).

These examples show a plurality of applications across diverse socio-spatial contexts. They are linked by a collective concern for socio-ecological justice and the cultivation of civic values across different urban contexts. For this study, the following chapter seeks to define the core characteristics of civic pedagogies (through literature), which in turn inform the practice-based action research. The subsequent review outlines the three fundamental origins for civic pedagogies: their situated epistemology, their roots in liberatory critical pedagogies, and the importance of agency as an outcome. Once these essential concepts are introduced, the remaining literature review focuses on the distinct learning methods, spaces and practices of civic pedagogies in critical spatial practice. These secondary themes provide the foundation for understanding that this research aims to extend and refine.

2.2 Situated Knowledge(s) and Learning

Civic pedagogies (CP) are a 'situated practice'. Learning takes place outside the traditional learning environments of our educative institutions, they are pedagogies of place and location, taking place within communities and their material geographies. This is significant for the epistemological positioning of the practice, rooting CP within feminist thinking, in embracing 'views from somewhere' (Haraway, 1988, p. 590) to develop knowledge from the partial perspective. In producing situated knowledge(s) CP are concerned with real-world relevance to people and place. Sandra Harding's (1992) thinking on standpoint epistemologies recognises that knowledge claims are always grounded in context and shaped by the author's particular social standpoint. In other words, 'one's social situation both enables and sets limits on what one can know' (Rosendahl et al., 2015, p. 19).

Haraway (1988) claimed that knowledge validity was directly relational to the communities in which it originates, calling for, 'epistemologies of location, positioning and situating' in rejecting the 'god trick' of scientific objectivism (p.589). This position is embraced by civic pedagogues, as it responds the challenge of producing new knowledge through collective learning, whilst avoiding the trap of producing knowledge which is only relevant to specific context in which it originates. Claesson (2017) discusses the relevance of situated knowledges within urban planning contexts (in Malmö, Sweden) arguing they:

Allow us to take responsibility in the here and now, but without neglecting universalising ideas of justice and democracy, keeping in mind that these notions are not static and need to be continuously and critically recaptured (p.52)

Claesson's understanding demonstrates the potential for foregrounding a situated epistemology, by responding to urgencies and context with a wider attention to the constant reproduction of knowledge through its collective formation. Situated knowledges allow learners to claim the 'view from somewhere' (Haraway 1988), and by articulating this position, help learners to valorise subjectivities. Feminist architect

and theorist Hélène Frichot (2018) links situated knowing to ‘situated material learning’ by reflecting its open-endedness and ‘not-knowing’ as constituent part:

It is a question of deploying a feminist objectivity as partial vision, limited location, situated knowledge and material learning. The lesson to be learnt here is: A practice is never independent of its environment-world or milieu, and you do not know in advance what a practice can become; it is a matter of experiencing–experimenting. (p.132-133

Situated (material) learning is therefore tied to both its physical and social context, being an on-going active practice of knowledge making, the ‘matter of experiencing-experimenting’. This understanding links to the field of urban and place-based education within activist and radical geographic traditions. Mcfarlane (2011, p. 363) argues that space and the physical environment is a key component in urban learning and that knowledge is constantly created and contested through this relationship of people and place. Similarly, Gruenewald (2003, p.4) argues that situated learning is needed so participants may have agency to transform the places in which they inhabit.

Theories on ‘situated learning’ can be traced back to Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger’s (1991) works in developing the field as a challenge to individual cognitive thinking, in favour of learning rooted in socio-cultural settings. Lave’s (1984) ethnographic studies on apprenticeship and the transformation of tacit knowledge by craftspeople, highlighted the social nature of learning. Under this notion learning is performed rather than transmitted, through direct membership within a community and the action of ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ (1991). In the case of CP, they create communities of co-learners united in their desire to transform their lived contexts. Civic learning, therefore takes place within what Wenger (1999) understood as a ‘community of practice’(CoP), a group assembled through mutual interest and shared desire to learn (Wenger, 1999). The creation of this community of co-learners is the first step in any civic pedagogy, one that is grounded in connection with locality and place. This situated dimension distinguishes CP from critical pedagogies in the place-based application of the learning.

2.3 Critical learning

Beyond situated positioning, CP are shaped by the histories of critical pedagogues working across diverse places and times. John Dewey and Jane Addams and the 'pragmatists' of the Chicago School are often seen as the forebears for critical pedagogies in their commitment to societal transformation and learning (Sandlin, O'Malley and Burdick, 2011). However, notions of 'criticality' in this field were developed in the 1960s, through Paulo Freire's (1970) critique of transactional banking deposit model of oppressive education in South America. Freirean critical pedagogies are rooted in the liberatory concept of conscientização (conscientisation or deep awareness) (Freire, 1970, p. 25). This describes the process of deeply reflecting on one's existing lived reality, with the aim of transforming oppressive structural conditions through educative empowerment (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). In the eyes of Freire, recognition of existing oppression(s) can lead to liberation through action, what was often termed 'praxis' (1970, p.26). This approach is inherently 'situated', as the understanding and observation of one's lived world is the basis for all subsequent knowledge and action. Through the situated practice of CP, learners explore the intersectional challenges of their localities and commit through action to change them.

In the eyes of Freirian pedagogy, all education is political. Giroux (2018, p.189) argues that critical pedagogies are about binding education to social change, democracy and civic activism. Critical Pedagogies have been inspiration for many radical education movements in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. 'Critical Indigenous Pedagogies' were developed as part of a wider call for decolonisation within the academy, aiming to empower indigenous research communities by valorising overlooked indigenous practices and knowledge production as a wider justice movement (Denzin and Lincoln, 2014, pp. 2–3). They have also inspired feminist radical pedagogues such as bell hooks, who sought to challenge hegemonic power structures (imperialism, racism, patriarchy), by nurturing critically conscious subjects, through collective learning in the academy (hooks, 2003). Both hooks and Giroux developed approaches in higher education settings by unveiling and

challenging dominant power structures within the classroom space, equipping students with tools to critically situate themselves and challenge these oppressive forces for wider socio-political change (hooks, 1994). Kim Trogal (2017, p.240) in her analysis of feminist pedagogies, speaks about how hooks' went to great effort to make space for all, ensuring 'habits of listening and valuing other voices' are centred in collective learning practices which focus on dialogue.

CP can learn a lot from the re-thinking and application of critical pedagogy in feminist and decolonial struggles. Criticality means attending to societal injustices (race, patriarchy, gender... etc) through education and learning. It is as hooks' termed, about creating new habits within the classroom, a project of re-imagining as space of radical possibility (1994). Altering habits, requires the unlearning of negative teaching practices (explicative and extractive practices), whilst giving space to underrepresented and maligned voices by valuing their experiences and knowledges. 'Underrepresented voices' also entails the inclusion of more-than-humans in the dialogue, centring ecological thinking and acting (Bowers, 2002). In this sense, pedagogies can overcome inherent power imbalances of 'knower' and 'learner' and commit to collective practices in which all contribute to the process.

The approach developed by critical pedagogues remains at the heart of wider calls to decolonise learning and knowledge production within higher education. Tuhiwai Smith (2012) has long called out the academy for its extractive approach, which reinforces existing knowledge hierarchies between Western scientific and indigenous knowledge. In opposition to this, CP can decolonise learning practices by shifting power away from HE institutions towards the communities where learning is embedded (Tan, 2021, p. 3). Criticality is about developing critical consciousness within subjects, to challenge ingrained power imbalances and hierarchies within a specific situated context. From this viewpoint, the development of consciousness comes by deeply understanding the physical context in which learners live, to reveal overlooked power structures and hierarchies.

We should, however, recognise that the sharing of power in CP does not make them decolonising per se; to decolonise means tackling root causes and injustices shaped by the historic legacy of colonial dispossession and extractivism (Tuck and Yang 2012). They do, however, offer possibilities for new forms of collective learning and unlearning, that aids the development of criticality and self-awareness in learners. Pelin Tan (2021) defines decolonised learning as:

[...] collective self-teaching, learning by acting together, rejecting the gap between theory and practice, and deconstructing terms in education that are sustained by the institution, while preserving traditional knowledge from the earth and nature. (p. 4)

This definition, points to a critical learning approach, rooted in the legacy of critical pedagogies. This critical learning approach is a collective practice in which situated knowledges are shared, exchanged, and enacted together. They involve the unlearning of dominant teaching methods and hierarchical imbalances, whilst giving voice to the marginalised. They link thinking and knowing to action, recognising the transformative potential of collective learning.

2.4 Agency

Although criticality is a central tenet of CP and governs modes of working, the aim is the production of agency within learners (Antaki, Belfield and Moore, 2024). Agency is a multifaceted concept, mobilised across many disciplines (including architecture) and concerned with the human condition. Sociologist Anthony Giddens (1984) developed thinking on structuration by exploring its duality with agency, recognising both societal structures and the ability to act independently of them are intertwined. For Giddens, agency was tied to the ‘capability of the individual to make a difference’ (p.14), recognising the capacity to act (or to choose not to) within constraining institutions and structures of their lived world. Agency goes beyond the

ability to think and links to Hannah Arendt's (1958) development of the 'vita activa', in her recognition of knowledge produced in action, the active-life (pursued through praxis), as the highest form of cognition.

Within the field of architecture and spatial practice the concept develops beyond anthropocentric viewpoints, to also encompass discussion on the 'agency' of buildings and the profession/practice itself. This Latourian (2005) Actor Network Theory worldview of architecture and architect expands the notion of agency beyond individual freedoms, towards wider critical questions of society. Kossak et al. (2010) in exploring its meaning within the field wrote:

The potential of agency might first be understood as the power and freedom to act for oneself, but for the architectural and architectural research community it also involves the ability to act on behalf of others, bringing responsibility. (p.3)

This thinking implicates the architect, as 'agent of change' within the process, recognising the capacity to enable others to act with agency. This was continued by Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till (2012) who termed 'spatial agency' as the empowerment of others through a different reading of socio-material space, to realise new freedoms that were previously unknown to them (2012, p. 53). This book proposed many ways in which agency was catalysed through critical spatial practices (2012). The role of mutual learning, within the process of spatial production, was highlighted as a space in which architects/critical spatial practitioners could act with others (Kossak et al., 2010; Awan, Till and Schneider, 2012). This is of significance as the production of agency is tied to education and learning, in the ability to recognise individual or collective freedoms.

Agency in Learning

The condition of agency is often central to thinking around education and learning. Whilst Giddens's (1984) thinking on agency was tied to structuration and conceptions of power (being able to act), education theory has developed alongside developments in critical, public and place-based pedagogical methods. Biesta and

Tedder (2007) challenge the notion that agency is a power held by the individual (and deployed), instead they argue it is something ‘to be achieved’ and directly related to social and physical contexts (p. 137). They define agency as a fluid concept, recognising that people can have agency in some situations but not others, and relates to ‘the availability of economic, cultural and social resources within a particular ecology’ (p.138). This fluidity is shaped over ‘the lifecourse’, arguing that certain forms of learning rooted in explorations of the self and the ecological context can support the achievement of agency (2007). This links to the radical pedagogues, who develop ideas of action and conscientisation as anchors of their criticality. Agency suggests ‘intentionality’, recognising the ability to develop possible action, to consider and evaluate its potential (future oriented thinking) and to ultimately exercise ‘choice’ as to whether to carry it out (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2015, pp. 2–3). Learning is therefore tied to the achievement of agency, and certain approaches which interweave reflective, embodied, and situated methods can help nurture agency in learners.

One such approach linked to situated and critical methods is ‘Agentive Urban Learning’ where young people use the city as classroom for learning and developing individual agency and capacity for urban action (Morrison et al., 2019, p. 204). They go on to outline how this approach links individual identities (reflecting on them) to collective responses (actions) to urban challenges (p.219). They use the city as a learning instrument to explore cultures, identities and group settings. The link between exploring identity in collective settings is further expanded by Edwards and Mackenzie (2008), calling this term ‘relational agency’. In both examples, the ‘achievement of agency’ is contingent on a learning environment where this duality can be explored. It must be a space for individual conscientisation, in the ability to situate the self (past, future and present) in lived contexts. Equally, the learning should be a collective inquiry, reflecting the sociality of emancipatory forms of education and group meaning making. Lastly, the agency of learning is an iterative and on-going practice, learners develop certain competencies through the process which can be explored within the context of available resources, and through time be committed to action (Koskela and Paloniemi, 2023, p. 171). In essence, agency is an achievement

in itself and through collective and reflective learning methods can be fostered by CP.

Collective (Civic) Agency

According to Koskela and Paloniemi (2023) collective agency means, 'acting together with others' (p. 166), in reference to their research on critical 'sustainability education'. They describe education's role in enabling, 'desire and competencies for collective actions' through the learning process (p.169). I would argue, that building the collective dimension of agency is important in the civic realm, recognising a group's ability to unite with shared solidarity for collective change (Sara and Jones, 2017). Or as interpreted by Forestiere (2015, p.456), civic agency is to think about the lived world critically, with the intent to realise productive change in society or place [as a group]. For many citizen activists, the realm of the neighbourhood and the communities in which they are rooted become the key sites for realising and testing newfound agency, by committing to its transformation. They are realised from the ground up, often first at small-scale as small acts of care for neighbours or neighbourhood, before growing into wider group actions. Civic pedagogies therefore have a dual purpose: to empower and awaken agency within learners, with the aim of collectively transforming the physical environment through action (Perez Martinez in Morrow, Mutschler and Waddell, 2020, p. 183).

2.5 The Spaces of Civic Pedagogies

On the Periphery of Institutions: Urban Rooms and Living Labs

Civic pedagogies exist at the borders of both the academy and spatial practice. They emerge as critical friends within the University aiming to transform practices from within, through the production of 'live' or engaged projects which respond to a university's civic responsibility to place (Levine, 2006; Goddard, 2016; Sara and Jones, 2017; McVicar, 2020). Projects such as the 'Live Works' in Moorgate, Sheffield become spaces of institutional collaboration, bringing together universities, local authorities and community groups to co-produce and engage within urban

planning (Butterworth and Lawrence, 2018). Live Works, is part of the Urban Rooms Network and aims to develop situated knowledge in response to local planning concerns by bringing in a variety of previously disconnected stakeholders around a table (Moore, 2023). In this example, CP unfold through efforts to make urban planning a more democratic process. Civic learning strengthens individual capacities through workshops, forums and performative events which deepen civic participation in the regeneration of Moorgate (Antaki, Belfield and Moore, 2024). Live Works can be understood in the context of the growing co-productive turn within our HE institutions, as they seek to provide a civic responsibility to the communities, they are grounded within (Levine, 2006; Goddard, 2016; Hemström et al., 2021).

The development of Urban Living Labs (ULLs) is another example of engaged scholarship linking higher education institutions, civic partners and local government actors around collaborative urban innovation (Voytenko et al., 2016). ULLs come in multiple forms, emerging from both the grassroot groups and the top-down, but always with a focus on situated problem solving (Bulkeley et al., 2019a; Aquilué et al., 2021; Scholl, de Kraker and Dijk, 2022). They have increasingly been used to innovate towards urban sustainability transitions in European cities and do so through experimentation, problem-solving and participatory methods (Evans and Karvonen, 2014). ULLs place clear emphasis on co-learning and co-produced urban knowledge in response to urban challenges (Voytenko et al., 2016, p. 50). Karvonen and Van Heur (2014) emphasise how urban laboratories produce knowledge validity through their work at the trans-local scale, appealing to those on the ground affected by the lab context but also producing actionable knowledge for other places through trans-local exchange (Karvonen and van Heur, 2014, p. 386).

Bulkeley et al (2019) further categorise living lab typologies; Strategic – state led, Civic – led by major institutions e.g. universities, and Organic – initiated civic and grassroots communities (Bulkeley et al., 2019, p. 323). Each governance approach comes with its own project focus, but embedded urban learning remains contingent to their divergent approaches (Evans and Karvonen, 2014; Karvonen and van Heur, 2014; Bulkeley et al., 2019). CP are a central part of this, using diverse learning

methods (e.g. iterative design prototyping) to engage with a situated local problems e.g. climate change adaptation. ULLs also try to deploy critical methods through the flattening of knowledge hierarchies which exist in traditional forms of research and learning, which is again consistent with CP approaches. They build agency in participants through their participation in the lab, their intent is to bring about change on both the local (material change) and the global scale (potential change) through taking collective action to address a specific urban condition (Bulkeley et al., 2019, p. 321).

Urban Learning Forums and Commons

CP are equally comfortable outside HE institutions, existing within the realms of a critical spatial practice (Pinder, 2008; Awan, Schneider and Till, 2011; Rendell, 2016b; Morrow, Mutschler and Waddell, 2020), exploring, testing, and envisioning new modes of civic learning, to critically re-think institutions. CP are embedded within the boundary spaces of the margins, a productive space in which to re-think and test new forms of governance, collaboration, and mutual learning.

Within the growing commons movement for more equitable cities, common pool resources are collectively governed by groups of commoners without enclosure (Foster and Iaione, 2019). Urban commons are spaces of active resistance to market-led urban development, instead creating spaces in cities which exist outside market logics, favouring the sharing of resources without commodification (Stavrides, 2015; Petrescu et al., 2022). They become spaces of 'active resistance' (An Architektur, De Angelis and Stavrides, 2010), often grounded in social and environmental justice movements (Stavrides, 2023). Commons, by their nature, should remain porous to new members and resources. When deeply democratic, they can become 'boundary commons' and spaces of radical inclusivity (Massimo De Angelis, 2017). Stavrides (2015) frames these porous commons as 'threshold spaces', spaces for connection, sharing, and connecting across difference (Stavrides, 2015). Cognetti and De Carli (2023) argue that 'threshold spaces' can be produced through critical urban learning, as a form of political 'prefiguration of more inclusive and emancipatory forms of urban practice and knowledge exchange' (p.5).

In their analysis of two European cases, they articulate the importance of physical space (urban commons and surrounding neighbourhoods) during the learning programme, by allowing learners to appropriate, nurture and grow relational networks (p.16). This highlights an important dimension of CP, that they are most effective when embedded within such boundary spaces (urban commons), in which inclusivity, democratic values, and the sharing of resources are ingrained.

Another concept developed in relation to radical learning is Colin Mcfarlane's (2011) development of 'urban learning forums' he writes:

The forum is a particular type of urban learning assemblage in that it signals the production of a centralized and organized environment specifically geared towards learning between different actors, including the state, donors, non-governmental organizations, local groups, researchers and activists. It is a specific space-time within learning assemblage: an organized encounter that may be a one-off or part of a series of events. The forum is an example of learning through coordination in that it centralizes and translates multiple different forms of knowledge from different people and groups. (p. 97)

It recognises the forum as a specific assemblage, that is organised, designed and curated from the outset. Similar to threshold and boundary spaces, these forums take diverse spatial forms, operating as coordination and negotiation devices for pluriversal knowledges (2011, p.97). To my mind, an example of an urban learning forum can be seen in 'The University of Neighbourhoods' (UdN) in Hamburg. The multi-year, design-based research saw diverse assemblages of students, academics, citizens, activists and visitors collaborate through an action-based laboratory for urban change (Kneiss et al., 2014, p. 59). The UdN had many distinct components, it was located around an (in progress) renovation of a vacant infrastructure (urban common), which became the geographic locus of activity, whilst in parallel learning with and from the surrounding neighbourhood of Wilhelmsburg. The project brought together a civic learning practice rooted in locality, whilst simultaneously, making the reproduction of a physical infrastructure (the UdN hub) a collective process, shaped

by hosting others (p.75). In the best possible sense, the UdN is an example of a forum's ability to translate and incorporate diverse knowledges through a centralising process.

This suggests several defining characteristics for the spaces of CP. They are border practices, operating at the edges of institutions, both in terms of the physical location (being embedded within neighbourhoods rather than campuses) and by assembling diverse actors to collectively design and learn together. By operating from the margins, CP can be themselves 'threshold spaces', connecting across differences and bringing together diverse epistemologies through learning. These threshold spaces also have a material reality in existing spaces of emancipatory struggle (e.g. urban commons or spaces of existing grassroots action). CP, therefore, have a duality between neighbourhoods in which they confront everyday socio-ecological injustice and a physical infrastructure (e.g. hubs, gardens, community centres) in which relationalities, trust, and togetherness can be formed.

2.6 The Methods and Practices of Civic Learning

Building on the legacy of the critical pedagogues who used their own teaching practices to cut across existing education hierarchies and embedded power imbalances within institutions (hooks, 1994, 2003; Giroux, 2010). Civic pedagogies can enhance agency through alternative learning methods and practices which challenge existing norms, deconstruct hierarchy and develop collective learning experiences as an act of solidarity and alliance building. In the case of CP, this means foregrounding embodied ways of knowing and experiencing. It is through critical spatial practice that these transversal methods are developed and tested, mediated through processes of design and care. This next section focuses on these key characteristics of the methods of learning and the practice of CP.

2.6.1 Building Solidarities and Forming Alliances

Due to CP place-based nature, forming alliances through assembled CoP is the first step in the process. These communities require on-going maintenance and care which in turn creates the conceptual space for civic learning (Simonsen et al., 2012). This also means reaching across boundaries, to groups often marginalised or excluded from traditional learning processes. Alliances and mutual relations are formed primarily at scale of the CoP, as this is the everyday space for engagement and operates at the inter-personal scale. Working with alliances means sharing power, by redistributing resources towards actors with fewer means, democratising the learning process, by promoting inclusivity (Antaki, Belfield and Moore, 2024, p. 20).

Building alliances as ‘infrastructures of resistance’ (Tan 2021, p.4) highlights the relational nature of CP, developing curricula and learning forums which respond directly to local challenges and needs. Alliances are often hyper localised, given the direct relations between the neighbourhoods and the urban learning forums. Alliances are also formed beyond the immediate CoP towards other local actors, grassroots and civic groups through shared solidarity and project networks. Tan (2021) describes these as ‘unusual alliances’ between disparate groups, who are connected through a shared sense of place or community. This connects with the inherent relationality within critical spatial practices, given the roots of this approach can be traced back to the relational art movement (Bourriaud, 2002). These relational practices form new (or enhance) networks of allies through the processes of spatial production, strengthening neighbourhood bonds.

On the other hand, solidarity is by its very nature something ‘trans-territorial’ or exists across geographies. Featherstone (2012) describes solidarity as a “transformative relation” which is formed by challenging oppressions and injustice through political struggle. They are practices that form new relationalities, new networks and commonality across place-based political struggles (Chatterton, Featherstone and Routledge, 2013, p. 613). In this sense, solidarity can be understood as a productive relation, building linkages beyond localised struggles, as part of a wider political awakening. These relations are at times conflictual but important is shaping political subjectification (Featherstone and Karaliotas, 2018,

p. 297). This is significant within projects of radical and emancipatory learning, as connecting localised liberatory education needs to wider global justice struggles are important in moving beyond the neighbourhood scale. It also recognises that many of the everyday challenges and oppressions experienced within the neighbourhood are rooted in systemic and planetary structures.

Whilst the practices of CP foreground the collective sharing of situated knowledge(s), they can build trans-territorial solidarity with the support of strong relational networks. Situated knowledge(s) from one locality can be used in other similar situations through the production of tools which transcend locality (Bohm, James and Petrescu, 2018). Whilst CP respond to the direct needs of locality, the modes of learning can be translated across geographies and be used in solidarity with other groups and practitioners. In this setting, the choice of learning methods is vital in producing solidarities and forming alliances. Tan (2021) described these as transversal methodologies reflecting their ability to cut across urgencies, the following section unpacks some common traits of learning methods in civic settings.

2.6.2 Embodied Learning

The role of the body in acts of cognition and learning has been long overlooked in Western society. In opposition to logic-centric epistemologies and the valorisation of the rational mind, thinking with and through the body has become a site of resistance and emancipation in education (Petrescu, 2023). Embodied learning is defined by Nguyen and Larson (2015) as that which, 'joins body and mind in a physical and mental act of knowledge construction' (p.332). Whilst useful this definition is perhaps an oversimplification.

CP are more specifically relating to the development of embodiment as part of feminist liberatory pedagogies. Gustafson (1999) defines the 'body as an epistemological site' in recognising how exploration through the body challenged dominant patriarchal ways of thinking and being, challenged assumptions and offered

new ways of constructing the self and new knowledge in the process. Embodiment can aid learners to more fully situate and understand the self through a holistic engagement with the 'body, mind, heart and spirit' (Lipson Lawrence, 2012, p. 73). This points to methods which situate the self within a physical context, leaning into processes that deeply connect with bodily senses. In studying embodied learning within direct action activists, Drew (2014) describes this sensorial and emotive learning as 'see-feel-learn process' (p.98). Recognising the role of the senses in shaping knowledge formation and legitimising it by grounding ourselves within the world (p. 96). By focussing on the senses and embracing emotion, embodied learning can build empathy for environments, negotiating ethics and values in participants. This is significant within climate movements and other struggles, as it valorises viewpoints driven by the perception and observations of injustice, it centres the body as node for deriving meaning and understanding.

Whilst embodied learning connects experiences and the self, it is also a collective learning process. Drew (2014) refers to the social nature of learning and recognises the importance of collective moments of reflection and connection. Embodied learning increases sensitivity to others through the sharing of 'relational knowledge', which can strengthen social ties and group bonds (Lipson Lawrence, 2012, p. 74). This strengthening goes beyond the anthropocentric and supports entanglements with more-than-human bodies on which we depend (Petrescu, 2023, p. 920). Embodied methods have an important role in widening our frame of understanding and help us to develop nuance and empathy with other bodies. Within CP modes of learning which connect with our bodily senses, emotions and ethics are vital for constructing self-awareness and criticality. In foregrounding these methods, learners can both explore their situated place within the world, whilst valorising historically overlooked forms of knowledge in the collective.

2.6.3 Shaped with Care

Care, it is argued, is inherent within teacher-student binaries within forms of institutionalised education settings (Shevalier and McKenzie, 2012). Noddings (2012) has explored this duality of the 'cared for' and 'care giver' in the mutuality of caring

relations in education. She argues, that receptive or attentive listening, dialogue (to produce empathic relations) and the creation of 'climates for caring' are important in creating positive experiences in education (2012). Whilst this is of relevance for any educative relation, this research focuses on institutional learning environments such as urban schools or HE institutions. Within CP the understanding is derived within the theorisation of care by feminist thinkers from the 1980s onwards, in the framing of an 'ethic of care'.

My understanding is rooted in Joan Tronto and Bernice Fischers (1990) definition of care as, 'a species activity, that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible'. This re-conception of care as an open-ended and ongoing process of negotiation and action speaks to its ethical dimension. It is as Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) states:

Makes of ethics a hands-on, ongoing process of recreation of "as well as possible" relations and therefore one that requires a speculative opening about what a possible involves. (p.6)

This interpretation is the disruptive capacity of care to create collective agency by redefining what the act of care constitutes (Trogal and Viderman, 2021, p. 106). This view helps to understand care as an ontology by focussing on the care acts themselves. More recently Joan Tronto (2019) has further elaborated her thinking on care in relation to architecture in response to the urgency of our climate crisis. In positing the multiple dimensions of caring (about, for, giving, receiving) she focuses on the notion of 'caring with'; how solidarity and trust are formed through the reciprocity of care acts (p.32). This is relevant for emancipatory forms of learning, it defines an ethical approach, in which the intention is to 'care with' other learners as a form of mutual exchange in which all are transformed. Kim Trogal (2012) argues:

These forms of pedagogy [feminist] are a means to care, in that they aim to foster the agency of the other, collectively increasing our knowledge, capability, desire and importantly our capacity to intervene in our own situations. (p.236-237)

Civic and other forms of radical pedagogy could therefore be framed as a ‘means to care with’, a space in which mutuality, reciprocity and learning to care are explored and tested. The action of collective learning has the potential to both perform and nurture care within learners (2012 p. 244). Whilst ‘caring with’ is not a method outright, it governs a mode of action in which CP should aim to cultivate.

2.6.4 Mediated through Design

In tracing previous examples of CP in CSP, we can ground the role of design(er) as integral to their production. By the term ‘design’ the research is directly concerned with the collective design of pedagogic experiences as an extension of CSP. There are numerous examples of architects, designers, artists and critical spatial practitioners utilising participatory tools to realise radical forms of learning (Antaki 2019 ; Morrow, Mutschler and Waddell, 2020).

Participatory and Co-Design methods have developed in the latter half of the 20th Century, and are often associated with the Scandinavian design tradition (Steen, 2013). Broadly, they attempt to democratise the process of design production, involving citizens as direct participants in the co-production of projects (Blundell Jones, Petrescu and Till, 2005). Central to most approaches is recognising inherent hierarchies and overcoming these by recognising ‘non-expert’ design voices, valuing situated and tacit expertise of collaborators as equitable partners (Awan, Till and Schneider, 2012). Binder and Brandt (2008) describe the importance of all stakeholders within a CoP as ‘having something at stake’ within the process. The successful co-design of CP is therefore reliant on overcoming expert and non-expert binaries, recognising voice and ‘what is at stake’ for those involved. The design of the learning programme is therefore co-produced from the outset, incorporating the needs and voices of those partaking.

We are surrounded by design; we live in a world in which citizens constantly renegotiate and redesign their everyday experiences. Manzini (2015) framed this across two polarities of design, ‘diffuse’ and ‘expert’:

Where diffuse design is put into play by “non-experts” with their natural design capacity, while design experts are people trained to operate professionally as designers... (p.37)

The intention is not to distinguish between these two design capacities as separate. Instead, Manzini (2014) argues for collective processes that bring them together through mediated co-design that delivers ‘social innovations’. Manzini’s (2015) conception of co-design as an open-ended social conversation is precisely the approach to curriculum co-production to which such radical pedagogies subscribe. In this setting, the role of design(er) is that of mediator of the process, bringing together diverse interests and needs, to form new alliances and networks. Teli et al. (2022) articulate the role of ‘cultural intermediaries’ connecting between grassroots communities and institutional settings, with the intention of community empowerment and mobilisation (p.5-6). The co-design of learning programmes is therefore a process of mediation interests, closely aligned with the methods of interventionist critical spatial practices in situated contexts.

In their analysis of two design-mediated CP in the global North and South, Antaki and Petrescu (2023) outline potential roles for spatial practitioners, as ‘agents, social makers, correspondents and caretakers’ (p.70). As ‘agents’, the designer initiates the process, finds and builds the network, co-creates the learning content, and administers or organises (e.g., writing funding applications, reporting) (p. 66). As ‘social makers’, they bring together unusual alliances between existing and new communities of practice, strengthening networks with local resources (p.67). As ‘correspondents’, the designer makes space for transversal learning and collective decision making (p.67), and finally as ‘caretakers’, they work with an ethic of care but also collectively care for ‘spatialities and environments’ (p.68). In these examples, the role of designer takes on new responsibilities in an expanded design practice, one which relates to a pluriversal understanding of how design interfaces with wider society (Escobar, 2018). Shared across these roles is a foundation in co-creation, which is defined as ‘a systemic process of creating new solutions with people, not for them’ (Mahmoud et al., 2021, p. 6). The methods used by critical spatial practitioners, therefore, favour participatory and co-design approaches, a context that will guide the subsequent research design in Chapter 4.

2.7 Case Study – Climate Care 2019 – 2021

2.7.1 Case Study Research

Having outlined the characteristics and spaces in which civic pedagogies exist, this thesis now seeks to analyse one case study in detail. Case study research critically observes situated cases in context (Groat and Wang, 2013), using mixed methods to develop knowledge through their analysis (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Case study research is often presented in a narrative style, using a wide variety of data sources (Stake, 1978, p. 6). In this instance, the data is made up from document analysis from an online project archive, public lectures given by the two lead curators, academic journals, and auto-ethnographic reflections following a visit in 2018. The chosen case, 'Climate Care 2019-2021' was selected for its closely aligned thematic content: focussing on engaging learners with our climate emergency and developing radical pedagogies within an urban learning forum.

'Climate Care' is a bi-annual festival of learning which took place at the Floating University Berlin (FUB)⁷ in September 2019 and 2021⁸ (SoftAgency, no date). Climate Care is, 'a festival engaged with theory and practice at the intersection of climate challenges, ethics of care and environmental humanities' (SoftAgency, 2021, p. 3). The festival is a direct engagement with place and the unique spatiality of the FUB site. A former water drainage basin transformed into an urban laboratory for collective learning by Berlin based architecture collective Raumlabor (FloatingBerlin, 2021, p. 2).

2.7.2 Urban Laboratory to Natureculture Site

⁷ University is in strikethrough to reference the project having to rename itself "Floating Berlin" as the word University is a protected title in the German context, and due to legal challenge the group were forced to rename the project in 2019.

⁸ A third iteration of the Climate Care festival was organised in 2023, this iteration was titled, "Citterkratia" but is not included in this case study analysis.

It was 2018 when the site was publicly reopened, a former water retention basin built in the 1930s, now host to groups of architects, artists and academics. This urban infrastructure, cut off from the city by a network of community gardens and dense urban forest, had laid undisturbed for years (Floating Berlin, 2021). It was to become the site of a new urban laboratory for Berlin, re-thinking the institutional typology of the university, by focussing on the unique ecology of place (Figure 03) (Elarji and Michels, 2020). The FUB was host to a wide and diverse range of stakeholders and institutions, from the field of arts and design (Figure 03). In a largely unstructured overlapping of interests and response to the unique condition of the basin, this “chaotic” approach allowed for unexpected collaborations and for a community to coalesce around the site of the FUB project (Talevi and Karjevsky, 2021, p. 161). This first year was crucial in the formation of local alliances, partnerships, and a CoP that have continued to push the boundaries of the site and programme.

Since the first iteration and public programme in 2018, the site has continued to be iteratively developed, assembled, and disassembled⁹ in subsequent years. Its governance now formalised through the creation of the Floating e.V¹⁰, a self-organised collective of practitioners with the objective to care for site ecologies, bringing ‘non-disciplinary, radical, and collaborative programs to the public’ (Floating Berlin, 2021). Within this loose collective different working groups formed which align with individual interests. Each year there is a ‘space’ team tasked with building the new iteration of the urban laboratory, as well as working groups for programming, site, kitchen, garden, funding, communication (Floating Berlin, 2021). What is shared between these working groups is collective understanding of the unique natureculture of the water retention basin. Built on the understanding of Donna Haraway’s (2003) conception of natureculture, as the entanglement and intertwining of natural and cultural phenomena (Talevi and Karjevsky, 2021, p. 161). This grounding and

9 Every winter the built FUB infrastructures are disassembled for the winter months, a build team are responsible for the reconstruction of the site the following Spring. This helps the site to continue to iterate and respond to learning needs.

10 e.V stands for eingetragener Verein, which is a form of registered voluntary association in Germany



Figure 03 - Floating University Berlin, Floating Site Infrastructures in 2018 opening.



Figure 04 - The second spatial iteration for FUB in 2019.
Source: Floating e.V. Photographer: Lena Giovanazzi

appreciation for the unique character of the place, foregrounds the spatial character of the public programmes and pedagogies which follow. Through an interventionist or performative practice of building and programming, the site creates a unique space for Berliners to engage as embodied beings in a complex world (Elarji and Michels, 2020, p. 13).

It is through this direct engagement with the unique qualities of place that the space for civic learning is produced. FUB constitutes what Bulkeley et al. (2019) understood as a civic-organic living lab, drawing together wide networks of spatial practitioners, artists and academic institutions with a shared collective goal. It creates divergent outcomes and situates urban/ecological knowledges through each new iteration. The appeal of the space, its openness and ability to connect directly with place, contrasts with the institutional stakeholders and funders of the programme (Universities, local governments). This highlights the importance of having spaces outside our traditional learning institutions for empowering education to take place (see Figure 04).

2.7.3 Climate Care, Transversal Learning

Within the wider public programme and engagement, the bi-annual Climate Care Festival is held for two weeks in September. The festival is an attempt to critically reflect on the Floating e.V members positionality and embodied relations with the water retention basin, giving space and time to critically engage with an ethics of care and the climate emergency (Karjevsky, 2022). Whilst some of the learning festival is intended only for contributors to the project, much of the curriculum is open to public participation.

Thus far three curriculums have been organised with thematic variations which emerged through needs within the FUB site. In 2019 it was titled, 'Climate care: a curriculum for urban practice' learning from the complexities encountered through the emerging practices within the basin (SoftAgency, 2019). In 2021, it was titled

'Climate Care: The rewilding years', responding to the municipalities desire to re-wild the site, critically engaging with what this means across ethical and ecological scales (SoftAgency, 2021). Curriculum themes emerged directly from needs within the site and stewards of it. Aiming to cut across scales and extend beyond site boundaries to the wider Berlin ecosystem. This is typical of CP, with learning aims reflecting localised place needs within the established CoP, in this case, the extended network of collaborators within the Floating e.V.

Once the thematic focus and curriculum needs were determined, an open call for contributors was published. Under the curatorial guidance of Soft Agency¹¹ a programme was co-curated in response to each year's theme (Karjevsky, 2022) (Figure 05). This approach reflects what Manzini (2014, 2015) understood as 'co-designing with' rather than for communities. Project resources (funding, audience, platform) were shared with a growing network of collaborators. This open curatorial approach allows for new connections and alliances to be built, strengthening networks working within the field and acting in solidarity with existing practitioners in the field. This approach also strengthens existing ties within the community of practice, session hosts from one being co-learners within another, a shared practice or what Tan (2021) described as 'collective self-teaching, learning by acting together...' (p. 4).

What developed from the open call process was a diverse curriculum. Each iteration of the festival ran for 10 days. Open to the public in afternoons and evenings, offering a huge range of workshops, talks, events which addressed each year's theme. The modes of learning were broadly categorised into seven formats: workshop, reading, installation, screening, performance, conversation and music (SoftAgency, 2021, p. 5).

¹¹ Soft Agency 'is a diasporic group of female architects, artists, curators, scholars and writers working with spatial practices' <https://s-o-f-t.agency/>

CLIMATE CARE 2021: Schedule

	Friday 3/9	Saturday 4/9	Sunday 5/9	Monday 6/9	Tuesday 7/9
	ZABRTSKIE BOOKSHOP 16:00—20:00				
	I <i>A Soft Atlas of Planting Trees</i> - CLEO WÄCHTER o. 230 H3 - LISA ERTL AND SIOBHAN LEDDY <i>Un-Domesticating the Wild</i> - SOUND STUDIES AND SONIC ARTS, UDK BERLIN				
14:00-17:00	W <i>Wild Design</i> - MONA DE PAULA ANTUNES W <i>On the Trail of Water</i> - SELINA SYED W <i>Imagined Landscapes</i> - SUSAN FLOETZ			W <i>Top Harvest</i> - GARANCE MAURIER C <i>To learn comfortably in common (which is politics)</i> - MICHELLE TERRAN, MARC HERBST AND PARTICIPANTS OF THE SLEEPOVER	
17:00	R <i>Substratic Planet</i> BY LYNN MARGULIS GUIDED BY BETWEEN US AND NATURE	R <i>The Botanical City by Matthew Gandy and Sandra Jasper</i> GUIDED BY SANDRA JASPER	R <i>Marc's Ecological Notebook by Marc's Jasper</i> GUIDED BY PATRICIA REED	R <i>Selected Reading Stories for Sleeping in Common (which is politics)</i> GUIDED BY MARC HERBST AND MICHELLE TERRAN	
19:00	BREAK				
19:00	P <i>Calling into the Now (Part 2)</i> - TERESA DILLON + MEMBERS OF THE FLOATING E.V.	C <i>Rebuilding Berlin: from urban biotopes towards the multispecies city</i> - SANDRA JASPER	C <i>On Exhaustion and Biopolitical Rifts</i> - PATRICIA REED	S <i>A Fantasy Journey to the Planet Zorg</i> - MATERIAL FANTASIES	
20:00 AND AFTER	SUNSET				
	M <i>Faunal Landscapes! Ambienophiles</i> - B2B DJ SET INFUSO GIALLO + FOG PUMA	S <i>Natura Urbana (The Bischen of Berlin)</i> - MATTHEW GANDY AND SANDRA JASPER	I+P <i>Un-Domesticating the Wild, again and again</i> - Sound Studies and Sonic Arts, UDK BERLIN	S <i>Acasa my home</i> - RADU CIORNICIU	

6

	Wednesday 8/9	Thursday 9/9	Friday 10/9	Saturday 11/9	Sunday 12/9
	ZABRTSKIE BOOKSHOP 16:00—20:00				
	I <i>A Soft Atlas of Planting Trees</i> - CLEO WÄCHTER o. 230 H3 - LISA ERTL AND SIOBHAN LEDDY <i>Un-Domesticating the Wild</i> - SOUND STUDIES AND SONIC ARTS, UDK BERLIN				
14:00-17:00	W <i>Top Harvest</i> - GARANCE MAURIER W <i>Order from Noise</i> - LISA ERTL	W <i>Becoming Pattern</i> - VALENTINA KARGA, MARJETICA POTRČ C <i>Rebuilding Urban Spaces</i> - JOHANNA WEHKAMP, BARBORA SEDOVA		W <i>On the Trail of Water</i> - SELINA SYED	
17:00	R <i>Selected Readings on Virus</i> - GUIDED BY SPÄTSPÄT	R <i>Purity is Not an Option - Selected Readings</i> - GUIDED BY HOODOPS	R <i>Selected readings on Becoming Pattern</i> - GUIDED BY VALENTINA KARGA AND MARJETICA POTRČ	R <i>Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom</i> - (...) - GUIDED BY BLACK EARTH COLLECTIVE	R <i>A Parasitic Reading Room</i> - GUIDED BY SOFT AGENCY
19:00	BREAK				
19:00	C <i>Being the Batin</i> - JAKOB WALTER	W <i>Listening at the Threshold</i> - SIOBHAN LEDDY	P <i>Panarchist Dinner in Berlin 2100</i> - KATE TYNDALL AND SARAH FRIEND	C+S <i>Wangari Maathai - Centering Black Voices in the Environmental Movement</i> - BLACK EARTH COLLECTIVE AND RAHAB NIERI	P <i>Xoix</i> - COLIN SELF
20:00 AND AFTER	SUNSET				
	C <i>Calling into the Now (Part 3)</i> - TERESA DILLON	C <i>Nature, Protection and Right Wing Politics</i> - ARCH-COHABITATION PROJECT		M <i>Faunal Landscapes 2</i> - INFUSO GIALLO	

7

Figure 05 - Open Curatorial Design Approach, Climate Care Curriculum 2021.
Source: (Climate Care 2021 Programme, Soft Agency 2021)



Figure 06 - Hands-on Composting Workshop Climate Care 2019
Source: Floating e.V. Photographer: Lena Giovanazzi



Figure 07 - Water/Body Performance workshop Climate Care 2019.
Source: Floating e.V. Photographer: Lena Giovanazzi

Readings took place every day as part of an extended break between the afternoon and evening activities, and adopted a performative read aloud methodology (SoftAgency, 2019, p. 19). Workshops were typically more hands-on, learning a skill or making (Figure 06) whilst holding space for discussions in relation to ethics of care and climate emergency (SoftAgency, 2021, p. 11). A series of more passive learning modes such as installations, could be engaged with individually throughout the day. Evening programmes were punctuated by performances (Figure 07), screenings and conversations which set out to challenge dominant ways of seeing our world, by foregrounding eco-feminist standpoints (SoftAgency, 2019, 2021).

Shared across these modes of learning, was the centring of embodied ways of knowing and making sense of the place and body (Karjevsky, 2022). Through the unique connection of the curriculum to place (with its unique spatiality) new pedagogies were developed and tested, and in the words of Talevi and Karjevsky, 'to develop tools to live beyond the crisis' (2021, p. 162). To what extent this pedagogy provided the tools or develop agency in learners, "to live beyond the crisis" remains unexplored due to limitation of the available data.

Perhaps a limitation for this curriculum approach was in that the learning approach remained comfortably within the context of critical spatial practice, rather than opening to more diverse audiences. Two academics (Calvé and Gaudin, 2021) who participated in climate care in 2021 were critical of the curriculum for only reaching 'informed publics' and critical of the role of the space and programme within wider regeneration dynamics of Berlin (2021, p. 4). It is important to acknowledge that arts-led projects can at times limit the audience reach and can bring unintended spatial consequences, such as gentrification. It is important for future pedagogies to develop a broader reach which extends beyond the existing informed public in climate activism and critical spatial practices.

2.7.4 Three Lessons from Berlin

Spatial Openness

This pedagogy highlights the importance of situated, place-centred learning for civic pedagogies. The unique spatiality of site, the weathering conditions of the water retention basin and the natural processes of re-wilding create a convivial space for civic learning. The site and place of the FUB also dictates the learning needs for the curriculum, responding to the changing conditions (social and ecological) over the duration of the project. Scholarship has already been documented on this unique spatiality, describing FUB's urban infrastructure as a place of 'openness', 'unexpected proximities' and a space in constant 'fluidity' and 'renegotiation' (Ranzato and Brogini, 2024, p. 129). This creates a learning environment, which participants can unpack and question their own positionality, in relation to questions of co-existence in the city amidst an unfolding climate crisis. It also highlights a role for such urban learning forums being open spaces that assemble unexpected alliances of groups, individuals and in this case institutions through their material presence. These 'unexpected proximities' go beyond the social and engage learners in a more-than-human understanding of space and city. Creating a learning environment in which to re-think future nature-culture relations. It would seem evident, that the unique spatial context of the water retention basin is central to all exploration and learning within FUB, a hub from which sociality, understanding and action is rooted.

Curating Solidarities

The curriculum was co-designed through an open curatorial practice in response to the needs of the site and community who steward it. It speaks to Elke Krasny's (2015) thinking on 'urban curation' as a relational spatial practice with a deeply situated approach. By creating an open call it mobilised a network in Berlin and across Europe, strengthening trans-local alliances and linking groups responding to the climate emergency and critical spatial practice. In building these networks, Climate Care curated a performative and creative space to test new pedagogies, actions, and ideas as part of a wider festival of learning. One potential limitation is that this form of pedagogy remains exclusive despite its public openness and reaches already informed audiences. The concept of an 'open call' is one rooted in

academia and the arts context and perhaps does not resonate with less 'informed publics'. Despite this, the curatorial approach did enable diverse ways of responding to each bi-annual theme. It foregrounded embodied, performative and care-based learning methods in each iteration. I would also speculate that part of its success is down to its temporal nature, the festival is iterative, a moment which coalesces the network for two-weeks every two-years, a space in which bonds and relationships can be renewed and strengthened in the spirit of solidarity.

Learning with Climate

Finally, the curriculum creates an experimental space for learning and un-learning in relation to our contemporary moment of crisis. Centring embodied ways of knowing, framed through a relational ethics of care, it acts as a counterpoint to dominant forms of 'rational' knowledge (techno-fixes, decarbonisation) in questioning how we live with the climate emergency. The pedagogies being developed can be understood as transversal, attempting to provide new ways of seeing and understanding our lived worlds.

In this case, learning started from an overlooked and forgotten urban infrastructure for managing surface water drainage. An infrastructure designed in the previous century, telling a hidden story of the neighbourhood and its nature-culture entanglements. The location becomes a way of exploring and situating the self within a wider condition of our rapidly changing climate, and in this instance, to reflect on the existing ecologies which have emerged here prior to and during the FUB laboratory occupation. The learning attempts to raise challenges to existing dominant narratives in climate change adaption and mitigation, aiming to centre other ways of knowing by closely linking bodily experience to place. It is in this relation and questioning of climate, place (infrastructure) and the self, that the pedagogy is most effective. Cutting across scales, from the planetary to the microscopic, creating criticality through its complexity without always having the answer.

The pedagogy's framing of 'Climate' and 'Care' shapes the civic dimension of

the practice. 'Climate' frames the context, our moment of crisis and equally it's inherent spatiality at the scale of the city. 'Care' frames a particular ethic, value and questioning for how learners wish to act in response. The lesson here is on the value of both in framing projects of emancipatory education, as such the notion of 'Climate learning' needs to be more fully unpacked in the following chapter (3 – Situating the Practice).

2.7.5 Concluding Climate Care

In summary, this case points to three potential tactics for CP in practice-based research. The first, relates to the physical location of learning, spaces should centre 'openness' in a dual sense, both spatially/programmatically as infrastructure for learning, but also in sociality by being inclusive of diverse groups and creating 'unexpected proximities'. Secondly, pedagogies can strengthen the production of solidarities and alliances through transparent curation of the learning process. In this instance, co-creative methods instrumentalised by Soft Agency were essential to the opening-up of the festival to new allies and collaborators in Berlin and across Europe. Finally, the festival's framing around climate created a way of unpacking our contemporary moment of 'crisis'. Climate is a subject that allows for moving across scales, from the planetary to the personal.

2.8 Concepts for Civic Pedagogies

The aim of this chapter was to define the core characteristics of CP through literature review and case study, to inform the subsequent practice-based action research. As outlined, CP is an emergent practice associated with critical spatial practice and rooted in Freirian critical education. Their aim is to cultivate and build agency through collective learning, doing so through the production and sharing of situated knowledge(s) and learning methods. CP take place in specific spaces of civic learning, at times at the periphery of institutions (Urban Living labs and rooms) or within bottom-up spaces such as urban learning forums and commons. Through the process of their making, they support relational practices of solidarity building and alliance forming. They are mediated through design, designers often initiating the process, using co-creative methods and curating learning experiences with others. These are processes guided by an ethic and practice of care, 'caring with' subjects and planet. Lastly, CP deploy transversal methods to cut across existing hierarchies and power imbalances, favouring embodied ways of learning and knowing which cultivate empathy in learners. In summary there are a number of core concepts for civic pedagogies in practice:

1 Situated knowledge(s) and practice

Knowledge claims are contingent on the communities from which they are rooted. Civic learning recognises that all knowledge claims to be situated, and through the practice of CP develop new forms of situated knowledge(s) for urban and civic transformation.

2 Place-based learning, neighbourhood as site of transformative action

The space of the neighbourhood, classroom and city are essential for making sense of our lived experiences, it is through direct engagement and exploration of what on our doorsteps that we can develop agency for urban transformation.

3 Based in dedicated spaces of civic learning

CP work most effectively when embedded in dedicated urban learning forums. These are spaces outside the traditional learning environments of our education

institutions, and appeal to the local needs and the urgencies of learners and their neighbourhoods.

4 Flattening knowledge hierarchies by developing transversal methods

Building on the efforts of critical pedagogues to transform institutions, CP seek to overcome existing power imbalances in knowledge, by foregrounding collective learning and unlearning. This is done through the adoption of practices which cut across hierarchy and foreground alternative situated ways of knowing and learning through the body.

5 Building alliances and shared solidarities

They produce communities of practice as broad alliances of diverse groups; they build trans-territorial solidarities which can exist across geographies through the relational pedagogic practice.

6 Mediated and designed processes of care

Given their roots in critical spatial practice they are mediated by designers, who adopt evolving roles through the process (from initiation to evaluation). These processes of co-creation are governed by an ethic and practice of care.

7 Nurturing agency through civic learning

The ultimate intention of the pedagogy is to nurture the capability of agency in learners. Both in the individual sense as an 'achievement' and through a collective ability to take action in the neighbourhood (civic agency).

These key concepts inform the subsequent practice-based research, testing these concepts through action, aiming to extend these theories and practices of civic pedagogies.

3.0 Situating the Design Practice

3.1 public worker

Since 2014, my practice has been formed as part of public works¹². Entering the practice as an architect in training¹³, this collective has allowed for the development of individual desires within a shared vision. So, what was I entering into? It would be more apt to say I was ‘welcomed’ given the pre-existing friendships formed with then founding co-directors Torange Khonsari and Andreas Lang. public works has a long history, formed informally between artists and architects in the late 90s aiming to mutually expand both practices (Van Noord, O’Neill and Wilson, 2023, p.94-95). Torange described these formative years as, ‘a space for exploration in modes of cultural production be it participatory art or architecture’ (Khonsari, 2022, p. 31).

Since the late nineties and early two-thousands, this notion of ‘criticality’ within architecture has been cultivated by many theorists and practitioners aiming to rethink the ‘practice’ and make claim to new approaches. Jane Rendell (2016) coined the term ‘Critical Spatial Practices’ in 2003 meaning:

modes of self-reflective artistic and architectural practice which seek to question and to transform the social conditions of the sites into which they intervene.
(p.1)

The definition has three aspects: being critical of social conditions and injustice, being ‘of space’, pertaining to the built environment and finally to be situated across disciplines expanding beyond the disciplinary binaries of architecture or art. In this sense, public works describes itself as ‘working across architecture, art and performance’ (public works: About: Profile, no date), referring to the assemblage of fields in which members orientate their individual practices¹⁴. It also reflects the diversity of outputs within the group, projects range from buildings to zines and a plethora of design objects, events, and processes (Figure 08). This notion

¹² public works’ visual identity is lower case, a choice made by founding directors and continued today to signal an informal character.

¹³ Following the completion of MA in Architecture and on a pathway towards RIBA part 3

¹⁴ At time of writing public works is made up of 11 practitioners; 9 of whom were trained in architecture, one in fine arts and one in performing arts



Figure 08 - Park Products 2003-4.

Source: public works

Park Products was a year-long artist residence and trading project for the Serpentine Gallery in London's Kensington Gardens. It was a project led by Andreas Lang and Kathrin Böhm, collaborating with students from the Royal College of Art and everyday park users and workers. Eleven products were developed, produced and traded from a roaming market stall, these could only be purchased through swaps or barter.



Figure 09 - The Last Chair Arch 2014-15

Source: public works

This was the first project I worked on within public works, supporting Andreas Lang in the Summer of 2015 in the design, fabrication and construction of the project. This project built on local folklore and tradition to build celebratory chair arches in reference to it's furniture building past. During two-weeks we were on site everyday building 158 chairs with local residents before erecting the arch.

of criticality has a dual nature, we are critical of the disciplinary canons and the professionalisation of services typical within the built environment. However, we are equally critical, of the contemporary moment of 'crisis' (climate, social inequity, biodiversity etc). In addressing these compounding injustices, the practice 'criticality' now focuses on aiming to bring about social and environmental change within the built environment, a form of activism through persistence across a range of projects and scales (Harriss, Hyde and Marcaccio, 2020).

The outputs of the practice are diverse in their scale (from buildings to temporal events) and equally diverse in the aesthetic; public works does not have a 'house style' or singular approach to the work (Figure 09). Instead, projects are most typically co-produced with others and the outputs reflective of those involved. The methods used revolve around 'participation and openness' (Khonsari, 2022, p. 32) and defined by the 'context and collaboration' (public works: About: Profile, no date), meaning projects are often embedded within long trusting partnerships. The growth of participatory approaches within spatial practices is also reflective of the critical turn, developing feminist approaches that emphasise process rather than product. Process orientated approaches give more space for the unintended and allow for greater questioning of the project intent, creating opportunities to catalyse agency through pedagogic methods (Awan, Schneider and Till, 2011).

public works is constituted as a non-profit and the primary article of association, is the promotion of 'Engagement with citizens to empower them to take an active role in shaping their urban environments'¹⁵. This ambition, to engage and empower citizens towards action is tied to the methods of design. Creating collaborative project environments, where mutual knowledge is exchanged and produced. Through participation, collaborative learning processes have been a central focus of the practice approach. This shared interest in pedagogies and learning between public works members catalysed around a shared initiative and platform, the School for Civic Action (2017-Present) (public works: Projects: School for Civic Action, no date).

15 Memorandum and Articles of Association – 2017 accessed via Companies House

This civic school attempts to re-think learning institutions, recognising the value of tackling socio-ecological justice through situated schooling (Tate, no date). The term 'school' is used due to its familiarity with audiences¹⁶, but we attempt to creatively re-imagine what schools are and could be if their intent was to cultivate civic action. The learning content and methods respond to the direct needs of each locality, and the teaching borrows from multiple disciplines (arts, architecture, activist, academic) foregrounding performative methods (Harris et al, 2020, p.98). The School has no fixed location, instead operates across a network of 'civic classrooms', examples of which include arts institutions (Tate Exchange), neighbourhood forums (Roman Road Trust, community gardens and music-culture festivals (Roskilde - Figure 10). In this sense it is a nomadic practice, each deployment defined by the needs of its context, the groups involved and stakeholders they reach.

Finally, public works evolves and is defined by its collective. When I entered in 2014 there were two founding members and three new enthusiastic faces, today the practice has grown to encompass the work of eleven practitioners. The collective allows for the pursuit of individual approaches, practices, and projects within a shared set of values and ethics. We often work in small groups on projects (in twos and threes) in partnership or collaboration with communities, other practices or commissioners (Khonsari, 2022). This loose arrangement gives support and collective strength whilst allowing for members to take on work which they are passionate about and ultimately connects with the transformational goal to create variety in our design approach.

¹⁶ Almost everyone has a personal experience of 'schooling' whether positive or negative, but it is a more inclusive term than 'university' or 'academy' which we considered based on our shared experience of the Wembley Civic University.



Figure 10 - School for Civic Action at Roskilde Music Festival 2016-19.

Source: public works

A multi-year collaboration with Roskilde Music Festival during which the School for Civic Action would pop-up to trial different curriculums, aiming to learn from the temporary nature of these cultural spectacles. The SCA collaboration informed future curatorial and educational programming for the festival.

3.2 Situated Design Practice

Within the collective, my individual practice can be framed as a 'Situated Design Practice'. Situated knowledges frame the design process and tools, favouring co-productive methods which valorise and champion the knowledge of experience and place and make these central to the design process. Awan, Schneider and Till (2011) speak of architects needing to embrace mutual knowledge exchange (expert and non-expert) with communities when designing. To do this meaningfully and avoid the pitfalls of sliding down the ladder of participation (Arnstein, 1969), designers are required to embrace the partial view, the local and the non-expert within design processes.

To be situated also pertains to the notion more familiar with architects, the 'site' or context. Whilst, historically, the concerns of architects may have focussed on the objective analysis of existing environments or identifying opportunities and constraints within the red-line site boundary, to be situated in a place means to be embedded within both its physical location and its communities (human and non-human) who call it home. This creates an interesting challenge for spatial practitioners wanting to work in such a manner, how to sustain design practice within a place or more accurately a neighbourhood?

Since 2013 my own interest has been in finding modes of practice which are embedded within communities and places. This situated approach involves the grounding my design practice within specific neighbourhoods. Early experiences of this approach through a Masters Architecture programme were formative and continue to shape my practice within public works.

The scale of the neighbourhood has always felt crucial to practice, being both impactful in terms of socio-spatial change and directly affected through action. Neighbourhoods bring specificity of place, urban challenges and design problems, whilst simultaneously having unique social identities which are derived from their inhabitants (Barton, Grant and Guise, 2010). In adopting this position, a designer

is embedded within a neighbourhood (location and communities) which creates opportunities beyond the design of buildings or objects. When embedded within Deptford, Southeast London, I was involved as a neighbourhood planner¹⁷, gardener and campaigner¹⁸, and explored questions around gentrification through an arts council funded project in collaboration with Assembly SE8 and the Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden¹⁹. Deptford as a neighbourhood became the focus of the practice (Figure 11), which found ways to support local groups, friends and urban activists in realising a more just urban future. Doina Petrescu and Constantin Petcou (2023) (founders of Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée) have long argued for a situated design approach when working with communities in Paris. They wrote:

Ultimately, the architect might also act as a 'concerned citizen' who engages in long-term collective processes of social and political transformation that often start at the level of everyday life, in people, houses and neighbourhoods. (p. 179)

This position recognises that long-term commitments to neighbourhoods can foster wider change, recognising the civic duty of spatial practitioners in addressing urban injustice. This shift to long-term engagements with neighbourhoods has cultivated legitimate impact for public works. In Loughborough Junction, public

17 Between 2015-2019 I was a member of Deptford Neighbourhood Action, a group of Deptford based groups, activists and residents who were working towards the creation of Neighbourhood plan for Deptford. This work aimed to utilise the policy and legislative power of the 2011 Localism Act for residents to claim a bigger role in urban and social issues. Regrettably the plan was rejected by Lewisham Council as many of the resident-led policies contravened Local Authority policies.

18 MA Thesis project in 2014-2015, aimed to support the long-term vision for the Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden as an urban commons and resist local regeneration. This work supported the tireless work of the Deptford community in fighting to retain this space for future generations. After many years of campaigning the OTWG was demolished in 2019 to make way for housing redevelopment. The trauma associated with the violent destruction of the garden, which was the starting point for DNA and much local activism was ultimately a point in which I could no longer sustain my motivation to work with Deptford.

19 Tradeptford (2016-2017) was a 6-month ACE funded project which explored the role of the artist and architect in resisting local gentrification. Through 6 monthly 'markets' which explored different local themes these questions were interrogated, and new relations were established between community members and artists working with a common purpose.



Figure 11 - Tradeptford at the Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden.
Source: public works



Figure 12 - LJ Works Official Opening 2023, the culmination of 9 years' work.
Source: public works

works has been working collaboratively with Loughborough Junction Action Group (LJAG) for over 10 years, working as a 'neighbourhood architect' on behalf of this civic group, fundraising, designing, building, campaigning for essential social infrastructure in the neighbourhood (Figure 12) (Volont and Dobson, 2021).

In Bow Road, public works as helped establish a neighbourhood planning forum and built a neighbourhood common room through a long-term embedded position in this community (Khonsari, 2022). This shift to working with neighbourhoods, and their communities, was in part a recognition of the time and labour required to form mutually collaborative and trusting relations with people and civic groups (Khonsari, 2022). By embedding and committing to working with one place as a priority it creates affordances for new roles and responsibilities of the designer. Since 2018 my practice of 'concerned citizenship' has been embedded within another London neighbourhood, Poplar, East London.

3.3 Rooting in Poplar

Poplar is the neighbourhood of practice and the contextual focus of this research inquiry. It forms part of an ongoing situated design practice, as part of the R-Urban project, collaboratively building an eco-civic hub located within the Teviot housing estate, an estate of 790 homes built in the 1970s and now managed by the 'Poplar Housing and Regeneration Community Association' (Poplar HARCA). Understanding the social and urban history of this place is essential in evaluating the impact of the subsequent action research.

3.4 Poplar's Post-War History

Like much of the east-end and docklands area, Poplar was heavily damaged during the Blitz and needed reconstruction. The 'Stepney/Poplar' area was designated as one of the London County Council (LCC) eight 'Comprehensive Development Areas', which were intensive post-war rebuilding efforts which trialled new construction systems (Garside, 1997, p. 23). 'Stepney/Poplar' was the largest of these development areas with over 1300 acres of land and 21% war damage making it a priority for redevelopment (1997, p.24).

Central to this vision was the 1951 'Festival of Britain' which regenerated the heart of the Lansbury Estate (Poplar) and the Christ Church Street Market. This 'Live Architecture' exhibition (Figure 13), was a showcase LCC project, demonstrating the future of London housing with three storey low-rise blocks with gardens and generous public realm (Westergaard et al., 1954). The Lansbury estate and Christ Church Street Market remain central to Poplar today and were the beginnings of widespread housing renewal in the post-war period (1950-80). Other neighbouring streets were soon regenerated by the LCC including the Aberfeldy and Teviot Estate during this period. Poplar's most renowned building, Erno Goldfinger's Balfron Tower (Figure 14), was completed in 1967 as part of the then Greater London Councils (GLC) Brownfield Estate redevelopment (Roberts, 2017).



Figure 13 - The rebuilding on Lansbury, 1951 Festival of Britain.
Source Westergaard, J. et al. (1954, p.44)



Figure 14 - The redevelopment of Balfron Tower, 2022
Source: The Guardian (2022) Photograph by: Jack Taylor/Getty Images

3.5 Multiple East Ends

*'This [Poplar] is the real East-End, not West Ham'*²⁰

Poplar and the surrounding neighbourhood, which is today known as the Lansbury Ward, has a rich 'East-End' social history. It was originally developed to house the dockers of Canary Wharf and East India Company employees. Historically, this East-End identity meant White, British and working class, and this remained largely the case until the 1970s. Westergaard and Glass (1954), noted the sense of pride and neighbourliness that was rooted in these homogenous communities, to be 'born and bred' in Poplar during this period (1954, p. 54). This was despite the multiple social challenges, with residents facing a poor quality of life and a lack of social mobility.

This experience was only one of many East-Ends, reflecting a diversification of ethnic groups living within the wider Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH). Tower Hamlets has been the centre of UK immigration for Bengali Muslim families emigrating from the Sylhet region (Glynn, 2010, p. 922). This first started in the 1800s, with the arrival of 'Lascars' (South-Asian seamen) employed by the East India company who first settled near the docks and around Brick Lane (Ullah and Eversley, 2010). The Bengali diaspora then grew rapidly in the 1970s and 80s as wives and children joined partners who had set down roots in Tower Hamlets. This growth was often concentrated around geographic centres such as Brick Lane, colloquially known as 'Bangla Town', as migrants were often housed in precarious squats or informal arrangements due to exclusions from state housing provision (Glynn, 2005; Ullah and Eversley, 2010).

Since the 1970s, the Borough has seen the growth of the Bengali community and is now the home to many third and fourth generation families. This now extends to other parts of LBTH beyond Bangla Town, and the Lansbury Ward is one such area

²⁰ Direct quotations from interview transcript as part of the ProSHARE Research project. ProSHARE was a JPI Urban Europe funded research into practices of sharing in diverse communities comparing 5 European Cities. Interviewees for London case were selected through identification of residents and organisations local to the Teviot estate in Poplar. Interview transcripts are available via the white rose open data repository - <https://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-856163>

which has seen a growing Bengali community in the Borough. At present the Bengali Diaspora makes up the largest demographic group in the ward profile, representing 39.2% of the population (LBTH, 2014).

'Back in the day, Teviot was a no-go area for south Asians'

This growth also brought with it shocking experiences of racism within the community. The daily experience for the Bengali population in Tower Hamlets has been widely documented including their systemic exclusion from public housing services and the physical and verbal abuse suffered at the hands of British nationalists (Ullah and Eversley, 2010). This was a daily occurrence for the majority of Bengali families living within Poplar and Lansbury. One interviewee described her experience of living within the Balfour Tower in the early 2000s as her 'worst nightmare' citing physical and verbal racial abuse on a regular basis.

The Teviot Estate itself was a hotbed for racist abuse of Bengali and Somali families during the late 1980s and 90s, in a 10-month period (1990-1) there were over 200 racial attacks recorded (Cook, 1991). Experiences including physical beatings, racist graffiti and robbery were commonplace in this period on Teviot (Carey, 1985, p. 123). They reflect a wider experience of minority ethnic groups within the East End during this period. Whilst we can understand the present situation to be improved, the legacy of this abuse is still strongly felt within the community and requires a sensitivity when working within the neighbourhood. The Bengali community and other 'minority' ethnic groups continue to face everyday discrimination and the effects of structural racism.

3.6 Teviot Today

At present the Teviot estate remains part of a sleepy corner of Poplar and Lansbury, situated to the North of Balfour Tower, encircled by the A12 motorway, Docklands Light Railway (DLR) and Limehouse Cut. It remains isolated in relative

terms from the rest of London, '*a time capsule, it was left behind*', but this is changing.

London's real estate market, now has this neighbourhood in sight, as it starts a 20-year process to regenerate the area. In 2019, residents were some of the first in London to be balloted on the principle of regeneration, voting overwhelming in favour (86% in favour with 81% turnout) (Brooke, 2019). In real terms, this means the trebling of homes in the Teviot area through joint-venture between Poplar HARCA and their selected house builder Hill (Brady, 2021)²¹. Teviot is just one of many large housebuilding projects taking place within Tower Hamlets, the borough with the largest population growth in the country (22%) between 2011-2021 (Statistics, 2022).

Many of the residents interviewed for ProSHARE research were tentatively positive about the incoming change, appreciating the improved build quality of other developments and an urban realm which reflects the aspirations of the neighbourhood. However, there was a general un-ease about what the future holds, how you avoid an '*us and them*' mentality between existing social housing tenants and the private newcomers. Many are also wary of previous promises made to tenants and broken by Poplar HARCA in other local regeneration projects such as Balfour Tower and Christ Street Market (Roberts, 2017; Minton, 2018). Often these projects start out with good intentions, like The Teviot, but become increasingly pressured through neoliberal forces and economic viability assessments before reneging on prior commitments (Virani, 2020). Balfour Tower remains a local scandal, decanting social tenants to renovate and re-sell apartments as examples of a luxury, brutalist ideal. The redevelopment has been beset with problems when homes went on sale in 2023, they were quickly withdrawn due to lack of interest in the cooling housing market. Today the joint venture plans to privately rent these units in the hope of better market conditions and the ability to recoup the £57 million invested in the tower gentrification (Jessel, 2023). Lessons have been learnt through this scandal, the regeneration of the Teviot is navigating this by establishing resident co-design processes and working groups to ensure resident voice within the neighbourhood

21 At time of writing a multi-phase planning permission had been submitted by the joint venture partnership (Hill and Poplar HARCA) to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The application was for 1900 homes of mixed-tenure, and the timeline for completion was between 2028-2042.

regeneration, something lacking in the case of the Balforn. Whilst this process has been intensive, taking place over many years and involving hundreds of hours of resident engagement and discussion, it takes place within the pre-defined constraints of the need for 1900 homes on an existing site of 780, meaning challenges of intensification of land, heights of buildings and neighbourhood services. At most I would describe this form of co-design on Arnsteins (1969) ladder of participation as 'placation' as the major constraints and decisions which will shape the future neighbourhood were determined via commercial viability assessments rather than citizen democratic control.

The wider Poplar and Lansbury area also faces many systemic social and urban issues. It is the ward with the highest levels of unemployment (18%) in Tower Hamlets and over a quarter of the population have no qualifications (LBTH, 2014; Virani, 2020). As is often the case, these neighbourhoods with lower socio-economic standing are also the most at risk from other systemic injustices such as climate change. The Poplar and Lansbury ward is recognised as the highest risk category for climate impact by the Greater London Authority (GLA) in all categories (Flood risk, heat risk) (GLA, 2022). This is compounded by localised climate impact of tenants, living adjacent to one of London's most polluted roads (A12 motorway), with poor air quality disproportionately affecting residents living within walking distance of it (Burningham and Thrush, 2003). According to Breathe.London data²² Teviot and surrounding Aberfeldy has some of highest concentrations of PM2.5 and 10 within the capital (Breathe London, no date). Residents are being pushed at from all sides, high levels of unemployment, systemic health and climate risk exposure and the impending fifteen-plus-year regeneration and its disruption. Despite this, I have always been welcomed by the multiple diverse communities, its 'strong community spirit' and neighbourly support networks. It is within this small island of Teviot and Poplar that my own situated design practice is nested.

22 Open science Air quality monitoring project by Imperial College London

3.7 R-Urban (in) Poplar

In May 2017, public works arrived in Poplar, temporarily at Brion Place Garages, a vacant carpark and empty garages lot on the edge of Teviot Estate, sandwiched between 1970s housing to the West and the A12 motorway to the East. We came with baggage, bringing four shipping containers which housed the infrastructures of R-Urban Wick project from its former home in the Olympic Park.

R-Urban Wick ran from 2012-2016 and was initiated by public works as part of the wider R-Urban network led by Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée (AAA) (AAA and public works, 2015). It was located in the neighbourhood of Hackney Wick, a few miles to the North of Poplar, on the edge of the Stratford Olympic Park (Ferreri and Trogal, 2018). Unlike its French counterparts, which established ecological hubs in Parisian suburbs, the Wick sister project explored existing civic practices of resilience through events and knowledge exchange (Wick Sessions), a mobile workshop device (Wick on Wheels) and a cultural archive (Wick Curiosity Shop) (aaa and public works, 2015, p. 61). Following three years of engaged practice, a new network assembled around a new temporary re-use facility sited on the edge of the Olympic Park (aaa and public works, 2015, p. 51). During its two-year occupation of the Mobile City Garden site the hub developed containerised²³ infrastructures (Figure 15) including a small kitchen, a prototype Anaerobic Digester (AD), a tool-lending library and classroom space. These infrastructures and some of the emerging R-Urban network moved alongside public works from Hackney Wick to the Teviot Estate (Figure 16).

3.8 R-Urban, Resilience and the Ecological Transition

R-Urban is a European design initiative, led by Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée (AAA). R-Urban is a design methodology, which explores the potential of bottom-up, open-source strategies for resilient and ecological transitions for urban living (Petcou and Petrescu, 2015). The project realises working prototypes, in the form of

²³ Re-purposed shipping containers were used due to the time limited duration of the initial site in the Mobile City Garden. Knowing the project duration was maximum two-years the design decision was made around the need for project relocation after this lease end date.



Figure 15 - Building R-Urban Wick in the mobile city garden, 2015.
Source: public works



Figure 16 - Arriving in Poplar as the R-Urban project, bringing baggage in 2017.
Source: public works



Figure 17 - R-Urban Bagneux, Agrocite and Recyclab 2021,
Source: Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée

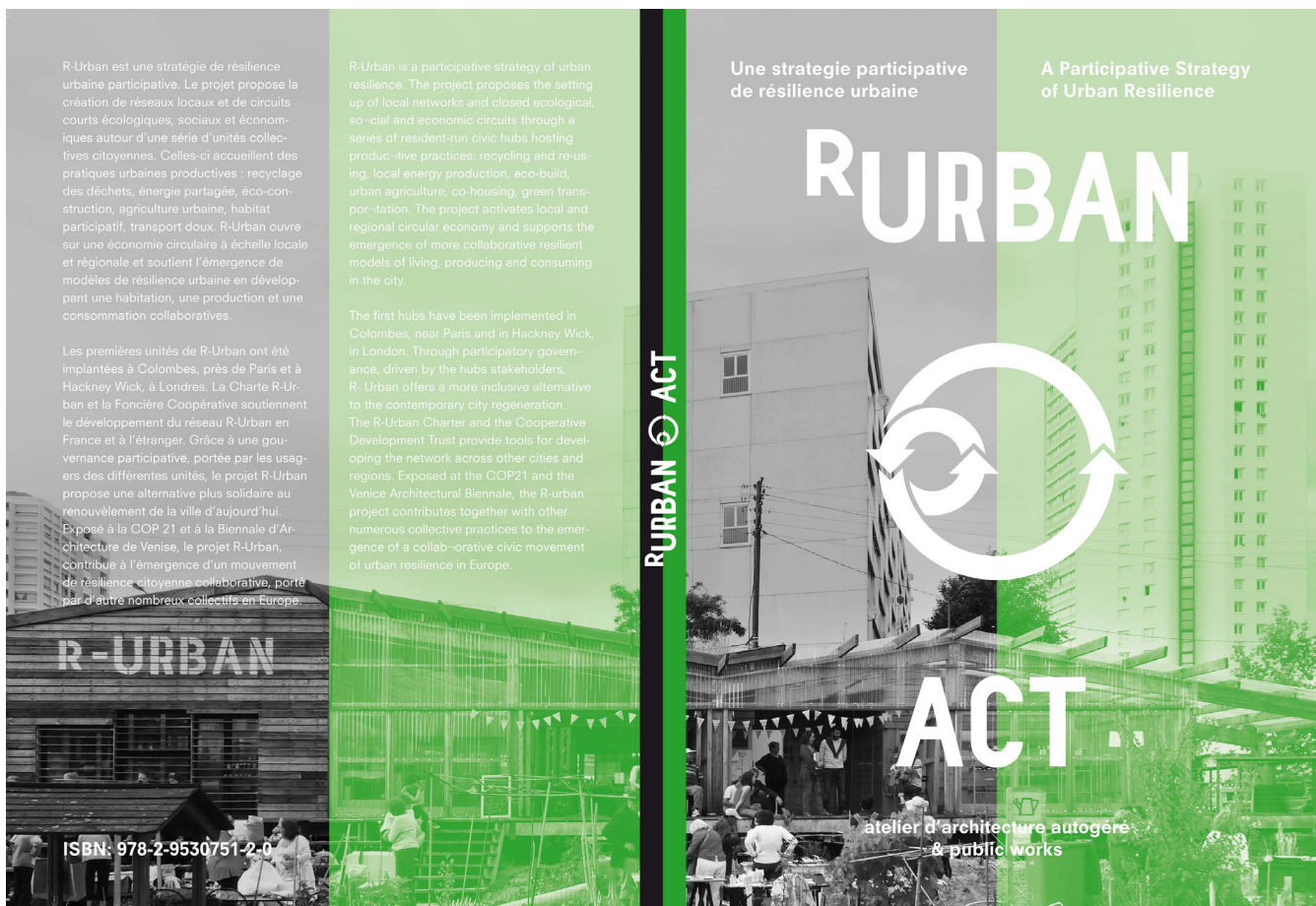


Figure 18 - R-Urban Act Publication and Resilience Strategy, 2015.
Source: Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée and public works

eco-civic hubs, which demonstrate the potential for circular, closed-loop systems as an alternative to existing resource management within cities (Petrescu and Petcou, 2020a). In addition to the two hubs in London, there are a further seven hubs in Paris (Figure 17) which explore urban agriculture (Agrocité) and resource re-use and upcycling (Recylabs) (Belfield and Petrescu, 2024).

R-Urban centres the idea of resilience as a form of civic ‘resourcefulness’, as understood by McKinnon and Derickson (2013) as the empowerment of participants within emerging communities for the sustainable transition. Developing civic resilience requires situated knowledges and skills that develop agency for ecological transitions (Petrescu et al., 2021). The hubs are living prototypes, demonstrating the possibilities of low-impact, circular building and economic cycles. These hubs become active manifestations of building ‘the future in the present’ (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010), by making visible alternatives to our extractive linear resource use in cities and society (Figure 18).

R-Urban strategies are bottom-up, working with the specificity of individual neighbourhoods and contexts, creating spaces which are conceived as urban commons, sitting outside the realm of state or private markets (AAA and public works, 2015; Petrescu, Petcou and Baibarac, 2016). Hubs become the focal points within neighbourhoods for non-commodified action by groups of commoners who assemble around them (Petrescu et al., 2022). Commoning is present through the ongoing stewardship of these resources. The role of design expands beyond the production of spatial infrastructures to the design of governance structures that enable their continued reproduction (Petrescu and Petcou, 2023, pp. 173–174). In Paris, the governance design converged around a R-Urban Charter, which is used by new networks of civic groups. In London, the R-Urban governance remains more informal and is still directly steered by public works, on the condition that the hub must remain an open common within the neighbourhood (Belfield and Petrescu, 2024)

3.9 R-Urban Poplar Eco-Civic Hub

The Poplar hub was started in 2017, having relocated from the Hackney Wick Mobile City Garden. It utilises temporary-use sites to prototype closed loop systems and engage in local resilient practices (Baibarac and Petrescu, 2019, p. 100). The hub is typical of “organic” Urban Living Labs, applying limited resources (capital) to address local sustainable transitions without a major institutional stakeholder (Bulkeley et al., 2019). Perhaps more precisely we described these hubs as a “civic-organic hybrid” given that the access to land is negotiated through major institutional stakeholders and public authorities, however these institutions have no role in the hub governance and programme (Belfield and Petrescu, 2024). In this case, public works negotiated a five-year peppercorn lease²⁴ with the local housing association in exchange for a free public programme of workshops around sustainability.

3.10 Infrastructures and Prototypes

The hub started with four repurposed shipping containers inherited from the Hackney Wick project, which housed a small kitchen, classroom, anaerobic digester (AD) and tool store (R-Urban | Poplar HARCA, no date). The project has then worked iteratively developing programmes, prototypes and physical infrastructure in relation to local needs and interests. The site now consists of a series of infrastructures which address two main themes, urban agriculture, and resource re-use (public works / R-Urban, 2023).

Work around a circular food system emerged in response to local needs, reflecting a strong existing desire for food growing and culture in the neighbourhood. This has been developed alongside prototype infrastructure around AD and composting to demonstrate the potential of a closed loop food system, as an alternative model in cities. Growing spaces are collectively managed by Teviot residents, using a micro-

²⁴ Peppercorn Lease refers to a symbolic exchange value in British law. It is used in contexts like these where land is ‘gifted’ in exchange for one peppercorn for a public benefit or common good purpose.

allotment model (40 sq/m) with additional shared communal growing space managed by site enterprises (45 sq/m). These spaces are allocated locally to residents in exchange for food waste to power the AD and composting prototypes (Figure 19).

The second thematic strand focuses on resource re-use and sharing, creating a workshop space and tool library that hosts a regular repair café. This involves the harvesting of 'waste' construction materials from within London and the re-use of these resources within the ongoing construction of the site.

The site's infrastructures have been developed incrementally as an iterative process of 'eco-civic prototyping', the designing, building and testing of low-tech, off-grid and open-source innovations (Belfield and Buck, 2021). This is an approach consistent with ULLs and urban commons, as sites of learning through process-based innovation towards sustainability transitions (Marvin et al, 2018). Prototypes often emerge from local needs, such as co-designing nature-based solutions to address poor local air quality as part of a wider research project initiated by public works. This prototype driven approach has meant the hub is constantly in a process of construction, always renovating, reworking, and intensifying the space. Prototyping is both a method of developing the site infrastructures but also a pedagogic opportunity, with learning programmes embedded as part of the process. An illustration of this process can be seen in the development of Moss Walls (Figure 20) to filter poor air quality. This participatory process started with a discursive dinner inviting residents to reflect on their relationship with air, and then engaged school children in making moss habitats, before working with architecture students to co-design and test initial concepts for a nature-based solution centred around the purification qualities of moss. This process culminated in the detail design and construction of a new site boundary which integrated learning and technologies developed through the prototyping process.



Figure 19 - 'Performing Digestion' participatory prototyping on site AD, 2019.
Source: public works



Figure 20 - Moss Wall Boundary Fence Prototype 2020
Source: Author and public works

3.11 Diverse Economies

Beyond hub infrastructures and prototypes, it supports a growing network of members and partner groups who contribute to the governance and operation of the R-Urban hub. Since 2020 the site has been home to two further non-profit enterprises working towards the sustainable transition²⁵. This is through the provision of affordable workspaces (12sq/m studios) for businesses with an interest in circularity or businesses from within the local neighbourhood. These workspaces are provided for free in exchange for in-kind contributions to the construction, running and maintenance of the hub, an example of the relational community economies which sustain the hub. This understanding of the diverse economy recognises the ‘submerged mass of the iceberg’ in challenging our understanding of the capitalist economy (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Whilst at present our economy favours commodity and monetary exchange, a diverse economy includes the ‘myriad of practices’ that support material wellbeing in society which exist below the waterline (Gibson-Graham et al., 2021). These ‘community economies’ produce this wellbeing in the geographies they are embedded. In the case of R-Urban Poplar, the hub is sustained by a relational economy beyond monetary exchange. Instead, R-Urban members swap time, knowledge, skills and tools for shared use of the physical hub. Members contribute to the operation and running, and in exchange, have space for their organisations or community groups to use freely. Petrescu and Petcou (2020b) argue that R-Urban hubs are important infrastructures in allowing community economies to flourish, as without ‘designated spaces for convivial exchange’ community trust and togetherness does not easily materialise.

In the case of Poplar, the relational and community economy which now thrives is dependent on the existence of the hub as a common asset, managed by a wider collective of members. Alongside these core tenant enterprises is a growing network of project collaborators, volunteers and residents who contribute to the running of the site. Although operating with common interests and values, the primary responsibilities (legal, operational) remain with public works, the long-term vision is to transition this hub into a new association, charity, or organisation for which public works is no longer legally responsible.

²⁵ In 2022 R-Urban Poplar was home to the main office of public works, a practice of carpenters who focus on re-use and natural building systems, and MADLEAP a non-profit CIC working on circular food systems and Anaerobic Digesters.

3.12 Hub for Civic Learning

The hub is the primary space of civic learning within the research design. It creates the opportunity for intentional and everyday civic learning through the ongoing public programme of events, workshops and training. It can broadly be understood as an 'Urban Learning Forum' (McFarlane, 2011) in the diverse assemblage of groups and knowledge which coalesce around the hub; a space that builds local capacity through processes of civic learning, in support of desired sustainable urban transitions (Petrescu et al., 2021). To date, there are several modes of learning already at work within the hub which need to be unpacked.

'Companions' is a weekly workshop session teaching green skills around food growing, composting and cooking (Figure 21) (public works / R-Urban, 2022a). Sessions are guided by (self-taught) expert growers or local community cooks, with the aim of teaching introductory skills to a wide public audience. This programme accommodates all skill levels and ages, from children to pensioners, primarily targeted at local audiences within Poplar. This sits alongside regular green skills sessions, which focus on sharing horticultural knowledge around specific plant care (e.g. how to grow tomatoes or courgettes etc) with a particular focus on organic methods.

'Repairs Café' hosts bi-weekly sessions organised around learning new skills or honing a craft to, 'repair, mend or make anew' (Figure 22) (public works / R-Urban, 2022b). These sessions are facilitated by experts, the learning is hands-on, by doing. Each week the session focuses on a specific form of repair rather than the open café format which is typical in Europe. Alongside skills these sessions cultivate a resilience through an awareness and appreciation of resources, aiming to fix rather than encourage further cycles of consumption. Attendees are both local (Tower Hamlets based) and for some workshops participants travel from beyond London e.g. computer building, as these sessions are free of charge.



Figure 21 - Companions Weekly workshop programme 2021-2024
Source: public works



Figure 22 - Repairs Cafe Workshop programme 2022-24
Source: public works

Alongside regular public programmes, the site has also hosted several summer schools, working with local youth centres and universities to develop teaching curricula as short one-two week courses for their students. These summer schools often follow architectural live project pedagogies, with a focus on prototyping and making new site infrastructures to address sustainability challenges. Prototypes developed through such moments include the first moss wall for filtering air pollution, a solar thermal water heater for the anaerobic digester, and Enzo Mari-inspired site furniture using re-used timber.

3.13 Climate Learning

These existing programmes aim to nurture civic resilience in subjects in support of wider sustainable and ecological transitions. They are grounded in our civic capacity to cultivate agency and respond to questions of how we can live in the climate emergency. They are a form of ‘Civic and Climate Learning’.

Traditional notions of ‘climate’ tend to be used in relation to climate science and an increasing awareness of climate change at a planetary scale. However, it can move beyond this and become a framework for neighbourhood action and situated learning. Tyszczuk and Smith (2018) call for the intersection of culture and climate change, bringing the arts and humanities discourse more closely to the centre of climate change debate. They argue that creative and arts-based scenario-thinking can allow us to think of ‘future imaginings’, and question how we want to live with a broken planet (p.60). ‘Climate Learning’ intimates forms of engaged and critical education focused on children and teenagers in institutional learning arenas (Upadhyay and Han, 2022; Doyle et al., 2024). These examples focus on the capacities of young adults and children in overcoming climate anxieties, through project-based and situated explorations of our contemporary crisis (2022). Svarstad (2021) develops this into thinking around ‘Critical Climate Education’ (CCE) which focuses on the relation between climate action and urban pedagogies in cultivating the requisite skills for citizens to understand and campaign for climate mitigation

measures (p.228). Without wanting to confuse matters further with yet another form of related pedagogy, it is an approach which resonates with what is happening in Poplar. Although the desired aims are different, learning the skills required to understand, advocate for, and take climate action are necessary if we are to overcome the challenge of a deteriorating climate. Action is needed across all scales in a shared climate movement, from the individual to the geo-political.

‘Climate Care’ (Chapter 2) is an example of climate learning, a bi-annual festival of learning which critically questions our futures, whilst exploring the intersection of climate action (through care) and place. The Eco-nomadic School (2018) explores this same tension through a trans-local exploration of multiple neighbourhoods, villages and cities. In this case, climate learning unfolds through a deep engagement with situated knowledges and the exchanging of skills (across geographies). In the words of Doina Petrescu, participants were ‘Learning to Act’ within the world (Bohm, James and Petrescu, 2018), as is experienced in Poplar. This learning is in most cases, hands-on, developing skills in an informal learning setting. Much of the learning is inward looking or knowledge that has applicability across contexts e.g. learning to repair clothing or learning to care for courgette plants. All the knowledge is however supporting citizens in making their own transitions towards sustainability through small actions of the everyday. It is within this existing context that the following action research is grounded, creating space and opportunity to test new pedagogic approaches.

4.0 Positionality and Methodology

4.1 Practice-Based Research

The grounding for the research methodology emerged through 7 years of practice as member of public works. This research sits within 'PhD by Design Research'²⁶ or what is referred to 'Practice-Based PhD' format in the Architectural discipline. This approach combines a portfolio documentation of the practice and its process (design work, built projects, creative works) with a written thesis which builds findings from it (Vaughan, 2017).

Christopher Frayling (1993) defined three modes of research connected to fields of design; research 'for', research 'into' and research 'through' creative practices (1993, p. 5). Whilst researching 'for' and 'into' design have been well established since the turn of the century, research 'through' art and design has been more difficult to define. Jane Rendell (2004) developed thinking 'through design' defining it as a practice-led and 'takes design processes to constitute the research methodology itself' (2004, p.143). In this thesis, my role as a designer does precisely this, designing and codesigning civic pedagogies within a specific context. Much of the discussion now points to whether practice/design-based research is to inform future practice or generate new theory, I would argue it can do both. Most directly it creates frameworks for future practice, in the sense of Donald Schon's 'reflection-in-action' (Schön, 1983), creating iterative cycles of practicing, reflecting, thinking and transforming the design practice. However, the thesis is also an attempt to contribute to this emerging field of civic learning, developing new concepts and knowledge by 'extending theories' to encompass new insights derived from the 'doing' of practice (Markussen, 2017, p. 92).

Robin Nelson (2013) continued to develop methodological approaches for arts practitioners in his framing of 'Practice as Research', where practice is the 'key method of inquiry' (2013, p.8). This approach builds on Schön's work defining praxis as the iterative cycles of "'doing-reflecting-reading-articulating-doing' (2013, p.32) and recognising that practice is also an epistemological standpoint. Nelson's (2013)

²⁶ Sheffield School of Architecture offers two pathways for PGRs; written research (80-100,000 words) and design-based research ('Significant and Original Portfolio' of Practice and 40-50,000 word sustained written research)

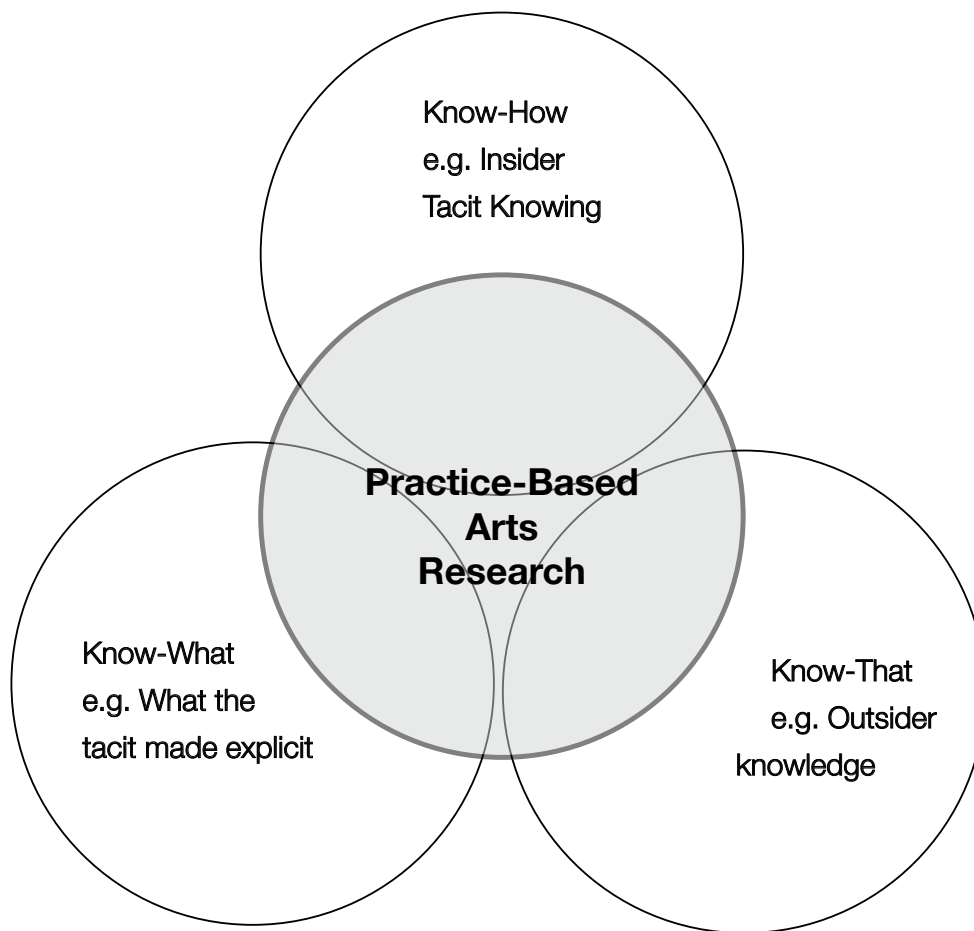


Figure 23 - Nelson's Practice-based arts research epistemological model
Source: Author

model centres around three modes of knowing connected through a combined practice. 'Know How' covers epistemological thinking from the act of practice, including forms of tacit and embodied knowledge inherent within the action (2013, p.41-43). 'Know-what', describes knowledge informed through reflexivity about the practice, developing criticality and transforming the practice through iteration (2013, p. 44-45). Finally, 'Know-that', recognises knowledge contributions for the future (theories) which are defined through the inquiry (2013, p. 45-47).

This three-part methodology is vital to understand how practice shapes the subsequent data, findings, theories and lessons. Engagement within the academy developed my reflexive capacity as a practitioner, the work could continue to exist as 'know-how' through the continued doing in the everyday of public works. However, the postgraduate pathway has been an enlightening experience in developing rigour through a combination of Nelson and Schön's reflexive models. As such, the methodology developed here draws on literature from other disciplines and fields, a critical and reflective moment on how to contribute know 'how', 'what' and 'that' to this new civic practice. The following methodology combines 'Activist', 'Grounded' and 'Participatory' approaches, developing a mixed methodology which shaped the methods chosen and research design.

4.2 Grounded

Given the research aim is to contribute new theories for emerging civic pedagogies and develop tools for future pedagogues, the methodological position is influenced by Grounded Theory (GT). GT emerged in the late 1960s, favouring the simultaneous collection and analysis of empirical data to construct new theories and concepts (Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014; Charmaz, 2017). Rather than adopting a Glaserian approach in which the data speaks for itself and theories emerge from it (1995), the research is shaped by a constructivist GT approach, in which the data is co-created with participants and the subjectivities of the author are recognised as an inherent part of the knowledge production (Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014, p. 153). Theories are co-constructed through iterative processes of collection and analysis, through cycles of abduction, in which 'best possible explanations' for the data are formed in the back and forth between data gathering and interpretation (Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014, p. 162).

Whilst the use of GT is less common within the field of Architecture and critical spatial practice, Bollo and Collins (2017) highlight its capacity for demonstrating rigour in evaluating qualitative data to inform theories derived from subjective experiences of real world spatial phenomena. The iterative nature resonates with action-based and practice-based research, linking cycles of action, the gathering and analysis of data (documents, journals, interviews), before starting new cycles of action from those emergent concepts. This cyclical framing has been central to the research design, working with a community to trial an idea, reflect upon it (collectively) and refine it through further cycles. These 'reflexive' moments are seen as a vital component of a constructivist GT approach, to ensure relevance to the academic audience and research community in dialogue (May and Perry, 2017). The thesis's findings, theories, and methods for future civic pedagogies are rooted in the data and practice of the project. Creating a critically reflexive space, in which concepts can be tested and explored through action. In short, the practice aims to generate 'extended theories' for CP.

4.3 Doing Activism

The scholarship is activist in its aim to contribute to social and environmental transformation through action. Critical Geographers and Urban thinkers defined a 'Scholar-Activism' which captures a breadth of participatory and action-oriented approaches in support of social change (Chatterton, Fuller and Routledge, 2007; Derickson and Routledge, 2015; Mayer, 2020). 'Design-Activism' also emerged in the early 2000s out of the fields of participatory design, social innovation design and coproduced urban practices (Julier, 2013, p. 226). This highlights the central role of 'design' in catalysing social change and its ability to foster greater consciousness in support of systemic societal shifts (Markussen, 2013, p. 38). This methodology draws from both activist positions.

Derickson and Routledge (2015) highlight the 'resourcefulness' of scholar-activism in its ability to channel resources from the academy to communities, in answering questions with local relevance as a precondition for active citizenship (2015, p. 2). This notion of resourcing communities through research is central to coproduced methods, mobilising the institutional resources provided through the PhD (time, capital, influence) to support grounded communities in wider social struggles. Cope (2008) speaks of academics needing to recognise their power (which is derived from the institution), to support social struggles and amplify underrepresented voices (2008, p. 433). This research aims to create locally useful knowledge which can be mobilised by practitioners and support local organisations through direct institutional support. In this case, the PhD pathway has been a way to redirect project resources towards new partners and members of the R-Urban hub. By framing the research through action, a wider community were able to participate in the production of CP, and the research develops a direct legacy in the form of learning programmes.

Taking an activist approach requires traversing multiple identities and spaces. Stephens and Bagelman (2023) describe the approach as 'inhabiting various in-betweens' (2023, p. 334) working as both representatives of the university and community. Scholar-activists frequently take a critical position within the academy,

aiming to transform research practices from within (Choudry, 2020; Stephens and Bagelman, 2023). Existing power imbalances, ingrained within scholarship, are recognised and overcome by coproducing research ‘with’ communities, rather than on or for them (Derickson and Routledge, 2015, p. 4). Scholarship has enabled a deeper participation within Poplar, as I embed myself deeper in the everyday of the project, whilst simultaneously retaining one foot in the academy, asking how the research remains collaborative, useful and transformational for those involved.

Design-based activism uses the design of processes, systems, research, infrastructures and pedagogies to catalyse social and spatial transformation. Design Activism relies on a ‘community of practice’ (CoP), a mutually supportive group committed to social transformation (Mallo, Tardiveau and Parsons, 2020, p. 1). They are collaborative processes, focussing on how design methods can be open-ended explorations (Ulv et al., 2021, p. 67). In this case, the ‘design of pedagogies’ became an opportunity to establish and work with a CoP, aimed at supporting wider climate activism in the neighbourhood. Design methods, specifically programme co-design workshops, became an opportunity to collaboratively think and act through research.

This form of action-through research is embedded in the everyday by, ‘challenging established powers ... granting opportunities for experimentation’ (Mallo, Tardiveau and Parsons, 2020, p. 3) and by intervening in ‘designerly ways’ in everyday life (Markussen, 2013, p. 42). Political activism, is rooted in the everyday as ‘participants attempt to build the future in the present’ and negotiate the worlds they resit, live within and seek to change (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010, p. 487). By grounding research in the everyday, it enables the potential for realising alternative futures, intervening in lived realities, collectively problem-solving together. Adopting this everyday grounding, can increase the likelihood of meaningful and diverse participation beyond the usual suspects or those who already have agency.

4.4 Participatory

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is applied across a broad spectrum of disciplines within the social sciences: popular education, health, feminist studies and the humanities (Kesby, Kindon and Pain, 2007). At its core is the fundamental principle to engage research partners as collaborative partners at all stages of knowledge production (Bergold and Stefan, 2012). PAR is aligned with activist approaches in their desire to achieve social change when tackling so called 'wicked problems' or societal injustices (McIntyre, 2014). The aim of this approach is to bring about social transformation through action and the co-creation of relevant knowledges for community partners (co-researchers) to utilise in wider struggles (Bell and Pahl, 2018; Hemström et al., 2021). This project has structured the research design through both action and participation, an approach based around co-inquiry.

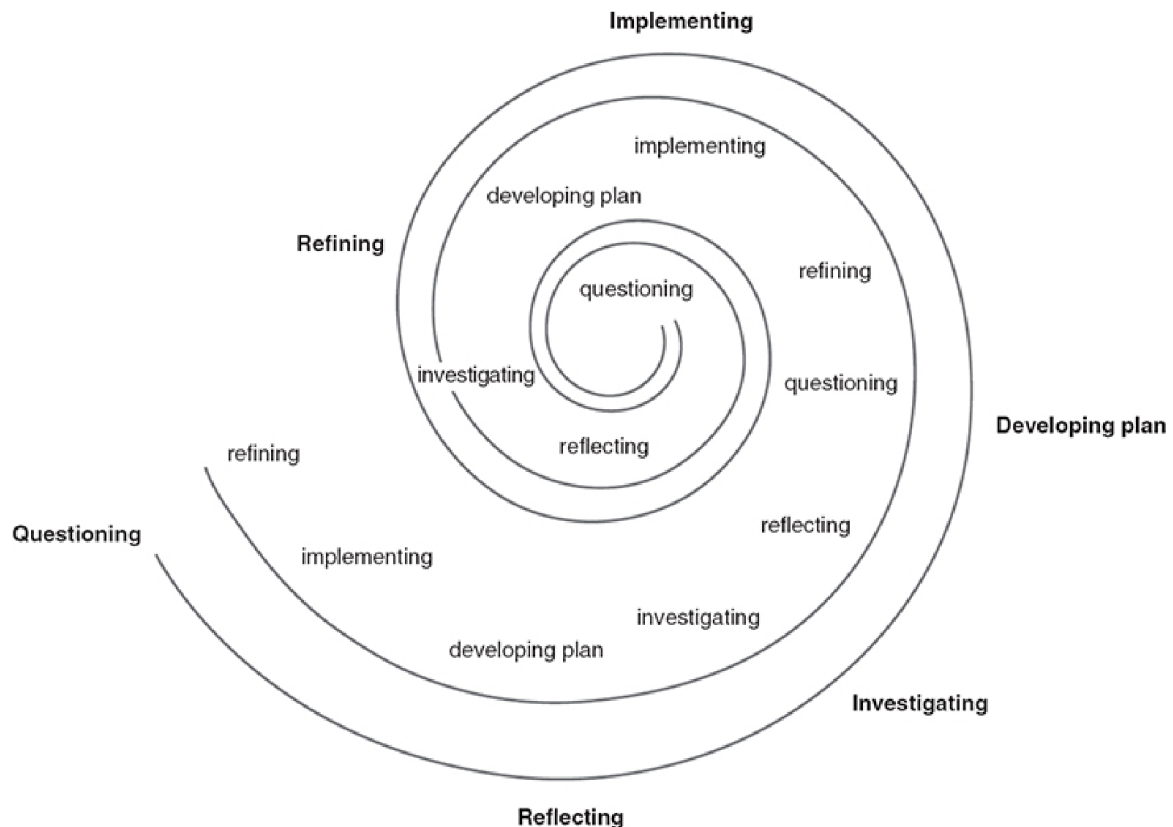


Figure 24 - McIntyre's 'Recursive and cyclical process'
Source: McIntyre 2014

Co-producing research ‘with’ communities can be time-intensive, as the engagement is reliant on the formation of trust between universities and communities on the ground (Hemström et al., no date). In this case, I entered the project with pre-established trusting relationships with an existing network of participants and co-researchers connected through the R-Urban hub. This embedded position, defined through the practice, was a rich starting point for the inquiry, and much scholar-activism follows an embedded approach with long-standing partnerships between civil society groups and researchers (Bell and Pahl, 2018). Co-Inquiry requires one to operate as an academic and a member of community simultaneously, different positions that coalesce around the research design, which must remain open-ended throughout, adapting and answering questions of local relevance and tackling situated injustices. To ensure this open-endedness, the research is designed through multiple cycles. McIntyre (2014) describes PAR as a recursive and cyclical process (Figure 24) of ‘questioning, reflecting, investigating planning and implementing action’ which in turn re-starts the process. Within this thesis, cycles of collective learning were structured around reflective and co-productive moments, helping to shape learning needs and desires for further cycles.

‘Action’ in PAR encompasses a broad array of possibilities. Actions and outputs range in scale from making policy recommendations to local authorities, to simply raising consciousness within a community in relation to societal injustice (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2009). Actions are directly linked to the realisation of change and societal transformation in the research subject(s). MacDonald (2012) argues that change in PAR includes both the development of agency in the research community and the ‘improvement in the lives of those participating’ (MacDonald, 2012). Whilst this may seem vague and hard to quantify through empirical metrics, social change in research contexts is defined by the group who participate. As McIntyre (2014) reflected, when reviewing a PAR project in Bridgeport and Belfast:

As the data reveal, action, in and of itself, does not confer on participants of PAR projects the power to change policy [project aim]. In the case of the young people and the women, their actions did not alleviate the social injustices that

frame their lives. Yet what the participants did do was respond in humanizing and authentic ways to issues that concerned them. By doing so, they concretized local knowledge and used that knowledge to make change. (p. 48)

This understanding highlights one of the challenges of defining scale and impact for PAR methodologies. The aim and intention for CP is to develop agency for transformation through a situated learning approach. This implies that impact is most concretely felt by learners in developing the knowledge, tools and capabilities to make change in their socio-spatial settings (whether on their individual experiences of the everyday, or through collective action in neighbourhoods). In this thesis, McIntyre's (2014a) interpretation of what constitutes meaningful change is helpful for contextualising what is possible within the scope of a PhD research project on CP. They can valorise and share situated knowledges between learners, developing the skills and capabilities to enact change at the scale of the neighbourhood.

4.5 Methods

Working through multiple cycles of action, many of the methods identified will be used across all stages, creating loops of reflection towards further action. This research builds on methods from the social sciences, design, and critical spatial practice. The subsequent literature frames which specific methods have been used, before presenting an overview of the entire research design and phasing.

4.5.1 Co-Learning and Auto-ethnographic Tools

PAR's methodological origins have close connections with Freirean (1996) liberatory education and Fals-Borda's (1987) participatory work linking research, adult education and transformative action. In almost all PAR approaches collective experiences of co-learning are central. Gough et al. (2023) define co-learning as, 'the process of creating collaborative, collective and reflective practices among

teachers, learners and community members in a non-hierarchical manner' (2023, p.113). Equitable partnerships between all parties are crucial. PAR advocates place emphasis on addressing power imbalances, valuing situated, and experiential knowledges in the process of knowledge co-construction. Emphasis on co-learning is essential for meaningful participatory processes, placing researcher and co-researchers on a level footing, jointly engaged in the process to design, implement and disseminate knowledge co-produced in the project (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2009, p. 93). Within the fieldwork, I entered the process as a co-learner within a CoP, who engaged from a position of not-knowing, with a desire to collectively learn and unlearn with those who took part. We avoided terms such as 'teachers' or 'students', instead opting for the broad term 'hosts' and 'learners', recognising the programme sessions required pedagogic facilitators, but all who participated brought knowledge and experience to share.

To generate data from this situated experience, one of the primary research tools was the recording of an auto-ethnographic journal. This utilises methods derived from the material turn within ethnography and what Stender (2016) describes as architectural ethnography, combining an ethnographer's criticality and reflexive capacity with architectural process and practice. This journal was a space to record my own reflections, experiences, sketches, photographs and notes during the moments of action within the project. Sketching and drawing are vital tools for sense making within the design practice and offer opportunities to go beyond static representations of space and document the direct moments of learning and their spatial configuration (Tayob, 2018). In this case, drawings helped to express points of neighbourhood interest, configurations of the multiple 'spaces of learning' which informed subsequent analysis within the portfolio. These diary entries capture emotions, feelings, and in the moment reflections, recorded in the hours/days following each engagement. This auto-ethnographic journal contributed content for the 'Practice Portfolio' which acts as a project documentation and repository for the two learning programmes.

In addition to the programme documentation, relational mapping methods (Petrescu, 2012) are used to document the changing networks and stakeholder relations connected to the R-Urban hub. 'Relationscapes' highlight through two defined time periods (2021-2024) the changing hub partners, local civic actors, institutional and European stakeholders connected through Climate Companions. Relationscapes evidence how individual nodes within a network are connected, visualising actor connections within the R-Urban hub, before and after the research. These mappings are documented within the 'Practice Portfolio' and were exhibited as part of the International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam in an exhibition titled 'Give and Gain: Relational Economies of Care'. This exhibition was an opportunity to visualise and describe the non-monetised exchange systems and care relations which sustain the R-Urban Poplar hub.

4.5.2 Co-Design

Central to the project aim was the intention of 'opening-up' R-Urban to new voices, stakeholders and participants in an attempt to widen the network of groups and citizens who use and access the hub. Co-Design emerged within the Scandinavian tradition of Participatory Design (PD) and service design thinking in the 1990s (Steen, 2013, p. 16) and is applied across a diverse range of disciplines; including emancipatory civic education (Antaki and Petrescu, 2023), urban planning (Huybrechts, Benesch and Geib, 2017) and community-driven development (Seravalli, Agger Eriksen and Hillgren, 2017), often with a focus on delivering innovation within sustainable transitions. By co-design I'm speaking specifically about the tools and processes which enable generative co-creative experiences for participants in collaborative design exercises (Mattelmäki and Sleeswijk Visser, 2011).

Co-design methods have also been mobilised in support of commoning initiatives (such as R-Urban) in European contexts, e.g. the development of digital platforms to support existing commoners gain democratic access to resources (Bassetti et al., 2019), or the formation of digital toolkits to strengthen the reproduction of urban commons (Baibarac, Petrescu and Langley, 2021). Parker and Schmidt (2017) argue that co-design has a role in the formation of urban commons, by making space

for relationship building between public sector bodies and groups of civic activists (commoners). In this research, co-design processes were not instrumentalised to gain access to common pool resources, but to strengthen, enhance and support existing grassroots groups in their pursuit of more resilient urban living. Huybrechts et al. (2020) describe this as the ‘visioning’ capacity of co-design processes, in the re-politicisation of design to simultaneously tackle urgent global socio-political challenges, whilst responding to a locality and specific context. In this case, co-design tools were mobilised to engage a new learning community in the planetary dimension of a rapidly deteriorating climate, with sensitivity to local needs.

Teli et al. (2022) argue that design researchers have a mediation role in such processes, introducing methods developed and evaluated in other research contexts, bringing new ingredients to existing relational dynamics in response to local urgencies. Acting as project facilitator, my role in this process is to ‘makes things happen’, initiating a workshop process which identifies clear aims and needs to be addressed through the trial pedagogies (Manzini, 2014). Steen (2013) understands co-design as co-inquiry and the space of ‘imagination’, in which needs are first identified and then addressed through design thinking. Co-design processes are the moments in which these experiences can be facilitated and nurtured towards ‘innovation solutions’ to situated challenges.

In this case, co-design became a method of opening up the research process and hub to new stakeholders. This collective process started by first identifying needs within the R-Urban hub and later exploring learners desires through a structured co-design workshop programme. Binder and Brandt (2008) argue the success of co-design processes in community settings are contingent on all stakeholders having something ‘at stake in the process’ (p.117). In this case, co-design workshops became important moments allowing new voices to input and reflect what CP could give back to learners and vice-versa.

4.5.3 Qualitative Interviewing

Core to the on-going reflection and evaluation after each research stage, was the use of qualitative semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allowed co-learners and research participants to present rich personal narratives and reflect critically on their individual participation within the pedagogies (Gubrium and Holstein, 2012). The data gathered was first used to inform further action and co-design workshops, utilising the data to iterate the pedagogic process, and ensure evolution of the learning programmes, whilst simultaneously producing data to inform findings. This data was transcribed by the author and passages are left unedited in the spirit of letting the data speak for itself. Key to PAR approaches is the ability to foreground participants' everyday realities in the collection of interview data (Bergold and Stefan, 2012, p. 207). In this case, interviews were interested in participants motivations for taking part, their perceptions of the R-Urban hub and the direct experiences of the learning programmes experienced first-hand. Utilising the interview as a process of meaning-making for participants (Doucet and Mauthner, 2012, p. 10), participants were invited to reflect on what their participation enabled as impact on an individual and collective level.

In addition to individual semi-structured interviews, a focus group with the core R-Urban team allowed for wider collective reflections where knowledge is co-constructed between the group (Cyr, 2016, p. 248). Focus groups allow for data triangulation with other data sets (individual interviews, auto-ethnographies, mappings), which deepens the understanding of the research content (Cheng, 2014). In this research, the main aim and purpose is to critically reflect with core hub members on what the impact of the trial pedagogies has been on the hub, networks and neighbourhood. This provides further insight beyond the individual experience of learners which is significant for framing the overall impact. It is also a generative space for R-Urban members, collective sense-making can help to inform subsequent changes within the hub

4.5.4 Portfolio and Data Analysis

The identified methods generated a range of raw research data, including interview transcripts, co-design worksheets and mappings, auto-ethnographic journal transcripts and sketches, photography and video footage of workshops, and two relational mappings for the R-Urban hub in 2021 and 2024.

In this case, the making of a Portfolio of Practice (Part 2), which rigorously documented the pedagogies and their production, became the key analytical tool. The Portfolio was constructed in three iterations each being a way to reflect in the midst of the wider process. Each Climate Companions workshop was documented in the same way, collating images, auto-ethnographic reflections, plan drawings of the learning environments, and thematic analysis on the modes of learning and knowledge exchanged. Documenting each session in this way enabled common themes to emerge in the comparison of each workshop moment. Equally, producing plans of the key 'spaces of learning' supported more analytical thinking. Drawing became a key tool for making sense of what was experienced from an autoethnographic perspective, taking time to analyse images, film footage and personal reflections into one drawn representation. The Portfolio was iterated three times: first after CC22, again in the months following CC23, and finally during the write-up process. The constant revisiting, re-framing and thinking in the production of the portfolio was integral to overall analytical process.

In Constructivist Grounded Theory, data gathering and analysis are a recursive process that takes place throughout the research period, focusing on actions rather than explanatory themes (Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014, p. 155). In this approach, researchers move between 'initial' and 'focused' coding to shape interpretations, constantly moving back and forth between data and action (ibid, p.156). Analysing Interview transcripts and auto-ethnographic journal entries became the primary point of data triangulation with the Portfolio. Initial coding of interview transcripts was carried out as part of the programme reflection to inform future stages of action, with more focused coding being conducted upon program completion. To do this, the

research used NVivo software and an initial codebook, which was determined based on characteristics identified through Portfolio.

The final phase of analysis was carried out in the write-up process, this was through ‘theoretical’ coding, where best-case explanations (abduction) for observed phenomena are used to explain or extend theories and concepts within the research field (Markussen, 2017, pp. 159-161). In this case further cross-referencing with literature and new concepts and extensions of civic pedagogies emerged.

Contextualising and Situating

Literature Review

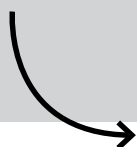
Critical, Urban and Radical Pedagogies
Situated Learning and Knowledge
Agency
Solidarity and Alliances
Urban Learning Forums, Urban Living Labs, Urban Commons
Transversal Methods - Care, Embodiment

Case Study Research

Climate Care 2019-21 - Floating University Berlin

Mapping and Representation

Relational Network Mapping (Poplar 2021)
R-Urban Hub Infrastructures (2017-2021)
R-Urban Hub Photography



Practice Portfolio

Climate Companions 2022-23

Research Methods

Auto-ethnographic Reflective Journal
Daily Diary Notes
Photography
Sketching
Architectural Plan Occupation Draw
Post-Evaluation Interviews and Focus Groups
Co-design Workshops
Discursive Dinners
Co-Mapping

Practice Methods (collaborative)

Programme Curation (organising, inviting, onboarding, network strengthening)
Programme Outreach (promotion, networking, knocking, flyering)
Hosting (hub maintenance and care, cups of tea, welcoming, supporting other facilitators)
Film making + Documentation (evidencing, archiving, exhibition)
Administration and Reporting (managing budgets, funder reporting, impact assessments)
Visioning (Reports and Case Studies - R-Urban Hub, Great Green Estates)
Exhibition Design - International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam

Figure 24.1 - Research and Practice Methods within each part of the thesis

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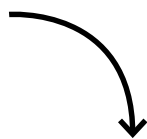
Outputs

Research Outputs

Post-Evaluation Interview Transcripts
Co-design Documentation and Programmes
Practice Portfolio

Practice Outputs (public works)

Climate Companions Films
R-Urban Recipes Publication
Great Green Estates
R-Urban Feasibility



Part 03

Extending Theories and Practices

Analytic Methods

GT Coding Interview Analysis
GT Portfolio Analysis
Relational Network Mapping (Poplar 2024)

4.6 Ethics

My understanding is derived from the feminist concept of relational ethics and an 'ethic of care' (Tronto, 1993). Ethical research is an on-going, open-ended process, extending beyond the formalities of ethics approval; consent is always under negotiation (Doucet, 2019). Researchers therefore need to be reflexive and alert to the everyday microethical dimension of the research (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004), attentive to the specifics of each participant, community and place. From this relational position, where ethics is an everyday, messy negotiation, rather than a set of rules or codes to be followed, we can frame ethics as a matter of care for all involved in the research process. Despite this, the ethics approval process within the academy is still a vital process, giving the researcher space to pre-empt and remove potential ethical pitfalls in the research preparation and leads to better research outcomes (Bryman, 2016). It also establishes best practice for the storage of personal or sensitive data. In this case, data is stored following the University of Sheffield (TUoS) PGR policy on Google Drive. Anonymised interview transcripts, co-design worksheets and auto-ethnographic journal entries will be uploaded onto ORDA, the TUoS data repository, to allow future researchers to utilise the data for future or extended research.

In the case of Climate Companions, ethical consent was sought at different moments and through different processes. Firstly, consent to film or record workshop activities was requested at the start of each session. Attendees were given the option to opt out of photography and film recording, and the hired photographer and research leader ensured this was implemented. In some cases, attendees joined workshops after this discussion, and in these cases, any imagery within the thesis has been obscured to protect people's identities. During workshops, booklets outlining the overall programme and project were available for participants who wanted to learn more about the research and the author's role as principal investigator.

Post-evaluation interviewees and co-design workshop participants were invited through email invitation; this was an opportunity to share the project information

sheet in advance (see Appendix 1). Interviews were conducted in person. The PI provided a recap of the project information sheet and research aim, and clarified that the interviewee could withdraw at any point without penalty. This was then followed by reviewing the consent form (Appendix 1) and asking any questions. The signing of the forms was carried out upon completion of the interview, rather than in advance, to allow time for reflection on the exchange and ensure they were comfortable with what was said. All interviewees are treated anonymously, and the archived interview transcripts have no personal information or details. The same informed consent forms were used for the co-design workshops.

A further complexity within this case was negotiating two different identities I took on. When was I acting as ‘researcher’ and when was I acting as ‘friend/ collaborator’? This was negotiated with transparency by making what was personally at stake as a researcher apparent from the outset with R-Urban members. This is common in practice-based research and other embedded approaches and requires constant reflexivity and checking in with the host community. This was still a challenging process to ensure that moments of data collection (interviews, diaries, and photography) were all conducted with care and sensitivity. Joan Tronto (2019) describes the many ways in which care is an action and practice by ‘caring with’. ‘With’ suggests a reciprocal caring relation, in which all actants negotiate and flourish. Climate Companions was an attempt to ‘care with’ members of the R-Urban community in Poplar. A reflexive, dialogic approach to working with the CoP was essential in negotiating the evolving ethical dilemmas and challenges.

4.7 Positionality

The author recognises that my own positionality, experience, and practice background shape the subsequent research and findings. Several unique conditions would make reproducing such research in other settings complex. Firstly, I come from an immensely privileged background; being a White, cis-gendered male citizen with higher education degrees, makes me unlikely ever to experience oppression

or systemic injustice. This is significant for action research, as realising the existing agency and capacities I hold as a researcher may create unintentional imbalances and hierarchies with participants in the process. Self-awareness, checking in with others and reflecting 'in process' are all vital to ensure that my own biases and agendas do not dictate what is intended as a participatory process.

Second, this research takes place in a relatively unique practice-based context. As outlined in Chapter 3, the study was conducted as an active co-director of public works. This brings with it other resources and abilities which may prevent other researchers from carrying out such work. In this case, public works was successful in fundraising for the project (outside the academy), providing resources to pay for workshop facilitators, materials and equipment. This was important as paying participants for their time and contribution is vital in equitable research experiences. Equally important was the wider labour of the collective; working on this alone, without critical voices or colleagues to support, would have been far more challenging for a lone PhD student. In this case, being a public worker was integral to the meaningful trial of civic pedagogies; without these existing networks and alliances, the research design would have been far more difficult. Working within one neighbourhood as public works over such a long duration (2017-present) also establishes strong, trusting relationships with other groups and residents. Entering research without these pre-existing relations would be a significant limitation. A further limitation of this approach could be the objectivity of the findings. How does one evaluate work fairly when one is so heavily involved in setting the aims and approach? Whilst I acknowledge this limitation, I hope the data gathered and rigour of their analysis justify the subsequent contributions (this is further unpacked in Chapter 9 – Conclusions).

4.8 Research Design: Climate Companions 2022-24

To limit the scope of the practice-based research the PhD is designed around a new project, 'Climate Companions' (CC). CC was a two-year action-research project nested within R-Urban Poplar's existing programme of events, workshops, and infrastructures. By focusing on a specific project, the thesis hopes to be able to reflect on data gathered to inform future learnings specifically on CP in socially diverse neighbourhoods. This methodological framework, defined by action, practice, and participation, shaped the research design. Reflecting McIntyre's (2014) cyclical and iterative approach, this research was conceived through multiple stages of questioning, designing, acting, and reflecting with co-learners in Poplar.

Climate Companions 2022 (June 2022 - March 2023)

Given the author's pre-existing involvement with the hub and community, integrating a nested PhD research project was relatively straightforward. As outlined (Chapter 3) R-Urban was already a space of informal civic learning and welcomed the opportunity to expand this with further academic resourcing. Through public works the R-Urban project secured additional grant funding through the local development fund (Teviot Community Chest) to deliver a programme of workshops which engaged citizens in climate action, sustainability and local health and wellbeing. This fund (£5000) increased the ambition of what the research project could achieve in scope and audience reach. Of primary importance was to ensure that the research aim aligned with R-Urban needs, goals and ethics. Hub members were keen to use the opportunity to test something new, in both content and methodological approach to learning. Through collective discussions with site stakeholders the following needs were identified:

- to design a learning programme which engaged with the wider neighbourhood of Poplar beyond the hub location (current learning programmes focused on skills and learning by doing 'on site')
- to collaborate with local organisations and grassroots groups working with

social and climate justice in the neighbourhood

- To develop knowledge and skills (as a group) for addressing climate change at the scale of the neighbourhood.

CC ran initially for two weeks in September 2022, framed as a 'Festival of Learning', as a nod to the intensity of the programming and way of communicating the project to a wider public. I was involved in this period of co-learning as host, facilitator, observer and participant in all sessions. This experience was documented in the auto-ethnographic journal and through the compilation of the practice portfolio, where initial reflections, notes, images and drawings were documented.

Following the completion of this action learning, a qualitative post-evaluation impact assessment was conducted. This involved post-evaluation semi-structured interviews with three participants, two of whom were selected as they were public attendees of over 40% of the fifteen workshops and the third was an artist who facilitated two workshops and attended a further two. This was supported through an online questionnaire survey sent to participants by R-Urban members as part of their funder evaluation. Through analysis of the interview transcripts and critical reflection of the first programme successes and weaknesses, the group were able to re-frame the approach for a further festival in 2023.

Climate Companions 2023 (April-November 2023)

Emerging from the reflections of the previous cycle, the research initiated a new co-design process, hosting a series of co-design workshops to collaboratively design the 2023 programme. The starting point was to form a new 'community of practice' (CoP) which could act as a project steering committee beyond existing hub members. R-Urban invited 13 regular attendees of the CC22 programme to these sessions, with 8 accepting. A further additional open-call sign-up brought a co-design group to nine (all women), with one representative of R-Urban and me acting as facilitator. The 2023 programme was again funded by the Teviot Community Chest, allowing another ambitious learning programme with an additional

research training grant extension funded by the WRDTP, which was put towards film documentation and facilitation costs. These two co-design workshops helped to articulate learning ‘needs and desires’ for the future learning programme, as well as collectively reflecting on successes and failures. Following this co-design process, the programme was curated, and the second ‘festival of learning’ took place over 4 weeks in June and July 2023.

During the learning programme the same auto-ethnographic methods and co-learning approach were used, and the further resourcing of the film maker enabled extensive documentation of the Climate Companions programme. Following completion, the research again conducted post-evaluation interviews, inviting two members of the co-design group to participate. They were selected as they had attended most sessions, and in one case facilitated a workshop as part of the programme. This was supported by a focus group interview conducted with active members (four participants from three organisations) of the R-Urban hub. This was to understand what impact the programmes had on the hub and those who operate it. In parallel the second version of the Practice Portfolio was iterated, documenting CC23 in the same manner as CC22 providing new insights and reflections through the Portfolio production.

4.9 Moving Forward

What now follows is Part 02 – ‘Practice Portfolio – Climate Companions’, a documentation of the pedagogies, the spaces of learning and auto-ethnographic reflection. The ‘Practice Portfolio’ serves as a repository of what happened, key statistics, descriptions, images and links to two short films. I invite the reader to immerse themselves in this material to get the fullest sense for what happened during the action research. Following this, the thesis moves into the findings and discussion chapters (Part 03).

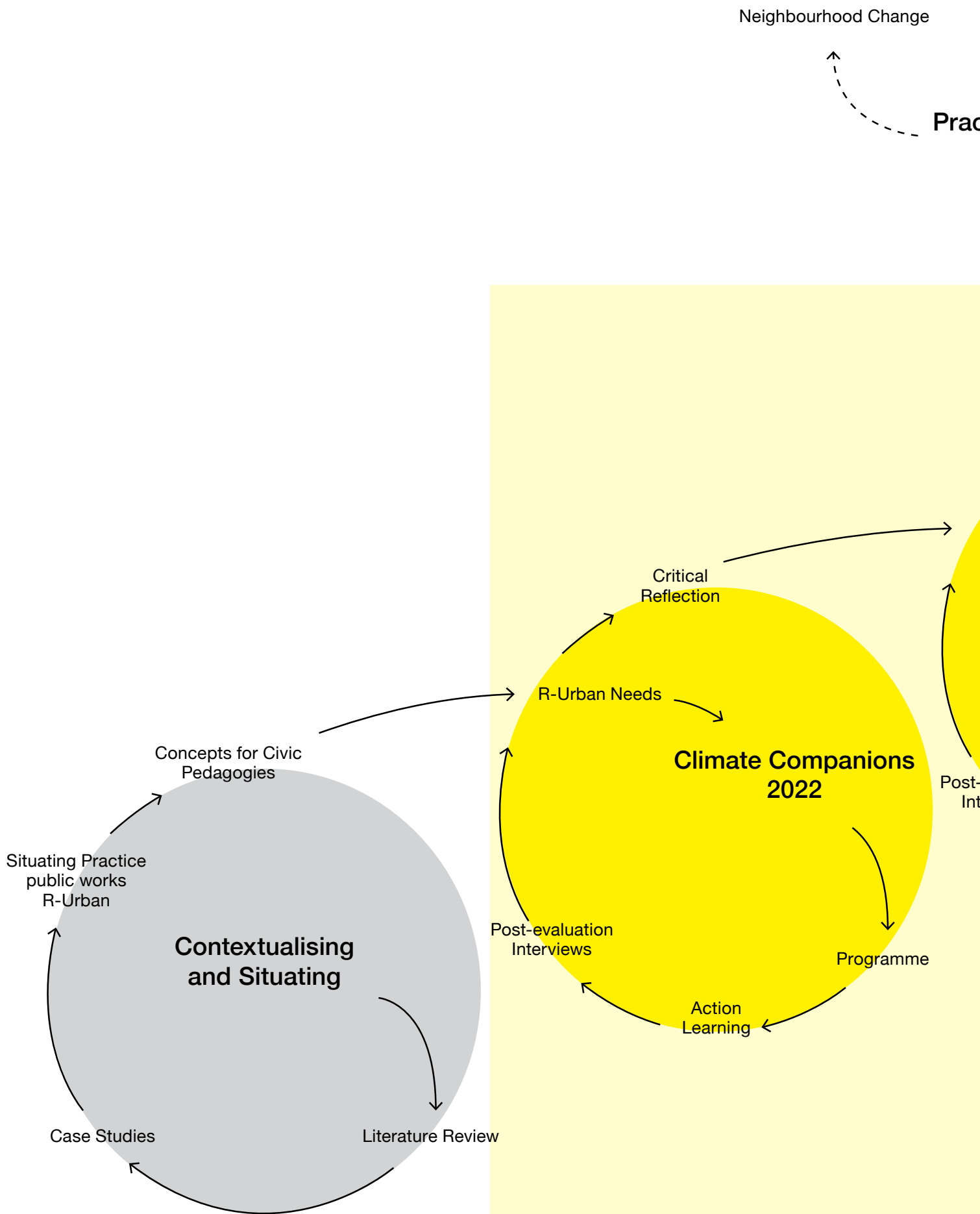
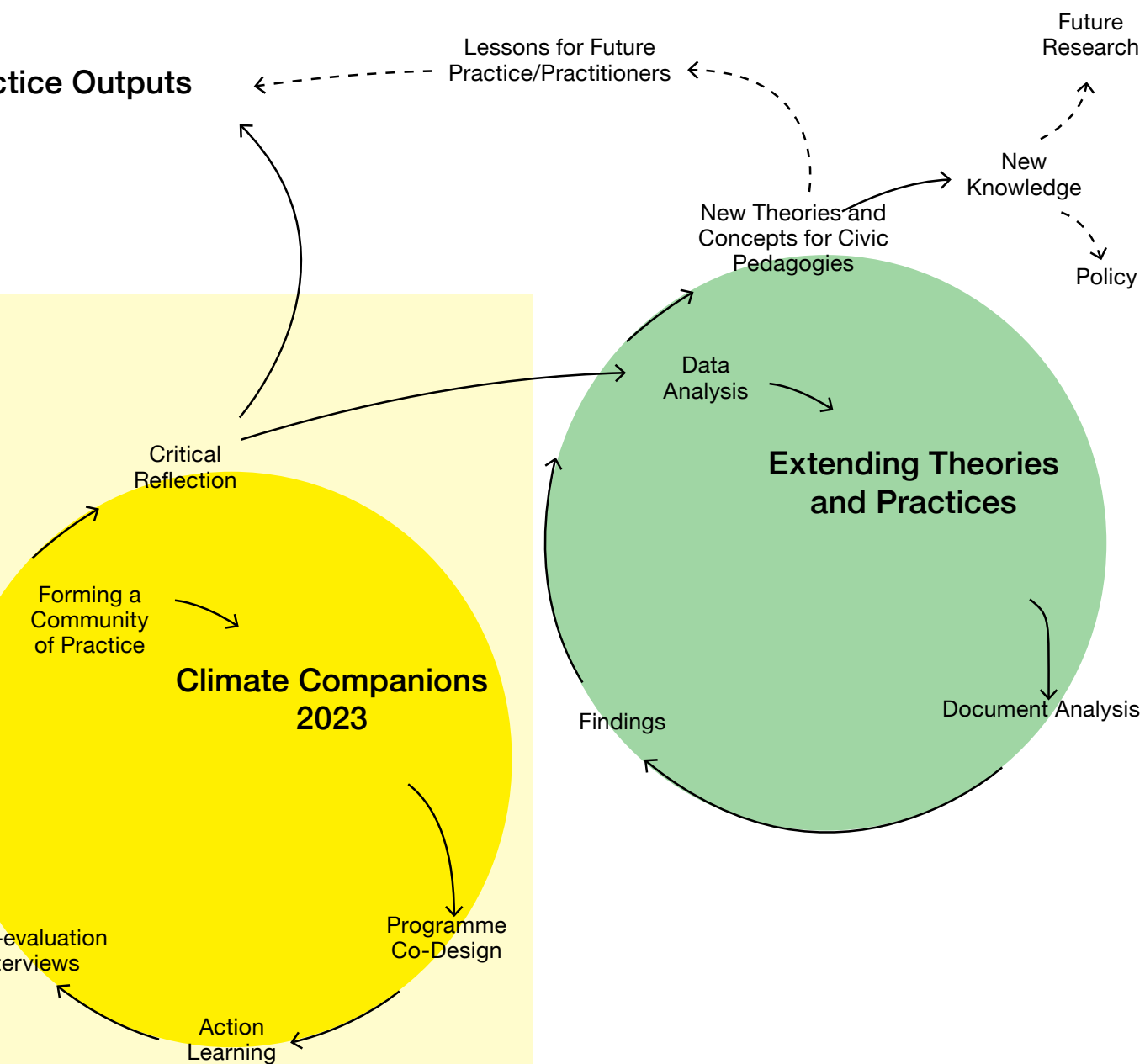
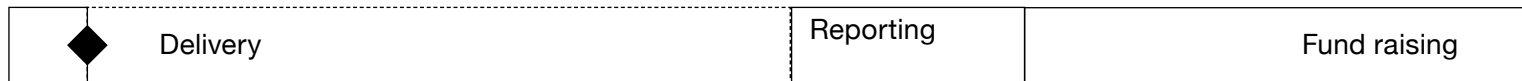


Figure 25 - Research Methods Diagram



Funding Secured
£5k social value
from Teviot LLP



Practice Timeline

2022

2023

Apr Jul Sept Dec Jan A

Fieldwork Timeline

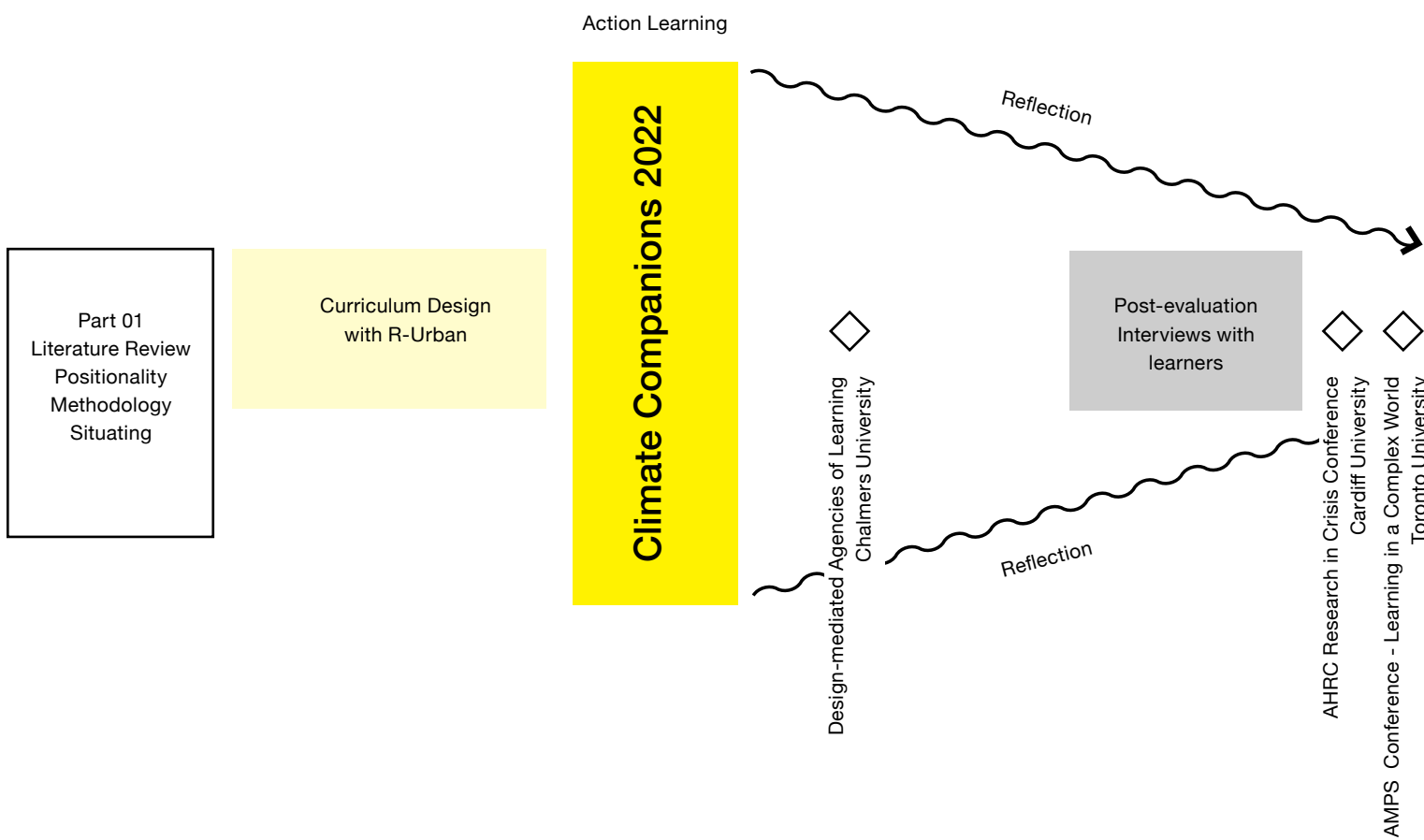


Figure 26 - Research Design Diagram for Climate Companions

Funding Secured
£5k social value
from Teviot LLP



Delivery

Reporting

2024

Apr

Jul

Sept

Dec

Jan

Action Learning

Curriculum
Co-Design 2023

Climate Companions 2023

Reflection



Situated Ecologies of Care
AHRC Conference - Portsmouth University

Post-evaluation
Interviews and focus
group with
learners

Reflection

Part 03 - Extending
Theories and Practices
Impact
PhD Write-up

Part 02

Practice Portfolio

Practice Portfolio Reader

The ‘Portfolio’ is a familiar tool within architectural education, a course requirement in almost all schools, and this document builds on that muscle memory developed in over 15 years in academic institutions. Rigorous documentation of the ‘process’ is something which I’ve always felt lacking in the everyday of public works, often frustrated by a lack of time and resources to do so meaningfully. The production of this document has been a joy. One that has been instructive in giving space to meaningfully reflect on ‘what we did’ after the fact and inform adaptations to further practice, a form of ‘reflection into action’ (Schön, 1983) through documentation.

The Design Portfolio has been developed iteratively in three main moments between 2022-24. Version one (v1) was produced after the Climate Companions 2022 (CC22) programme and alongside the post-evaluation interviews helped to inform the co-design and Climate Companions programme in 2023 (CC23). Following a short period of leave I returned to this document (Version 2, v2), following the same protocol for CC23 and the Co-design process. The process of documentation becoming a way of exploring certain characteristics of pedagogies (space and modes of learning), it

2022

2023

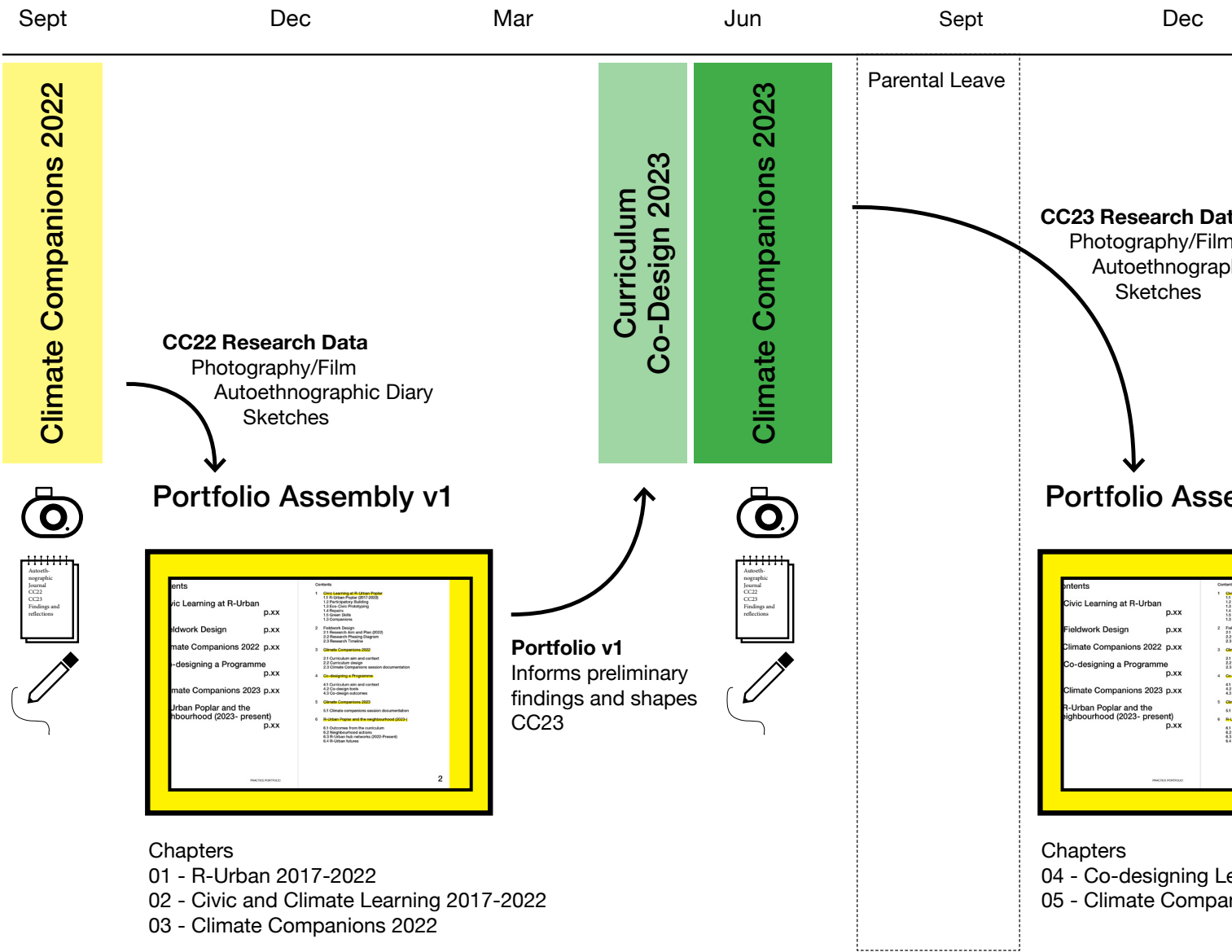


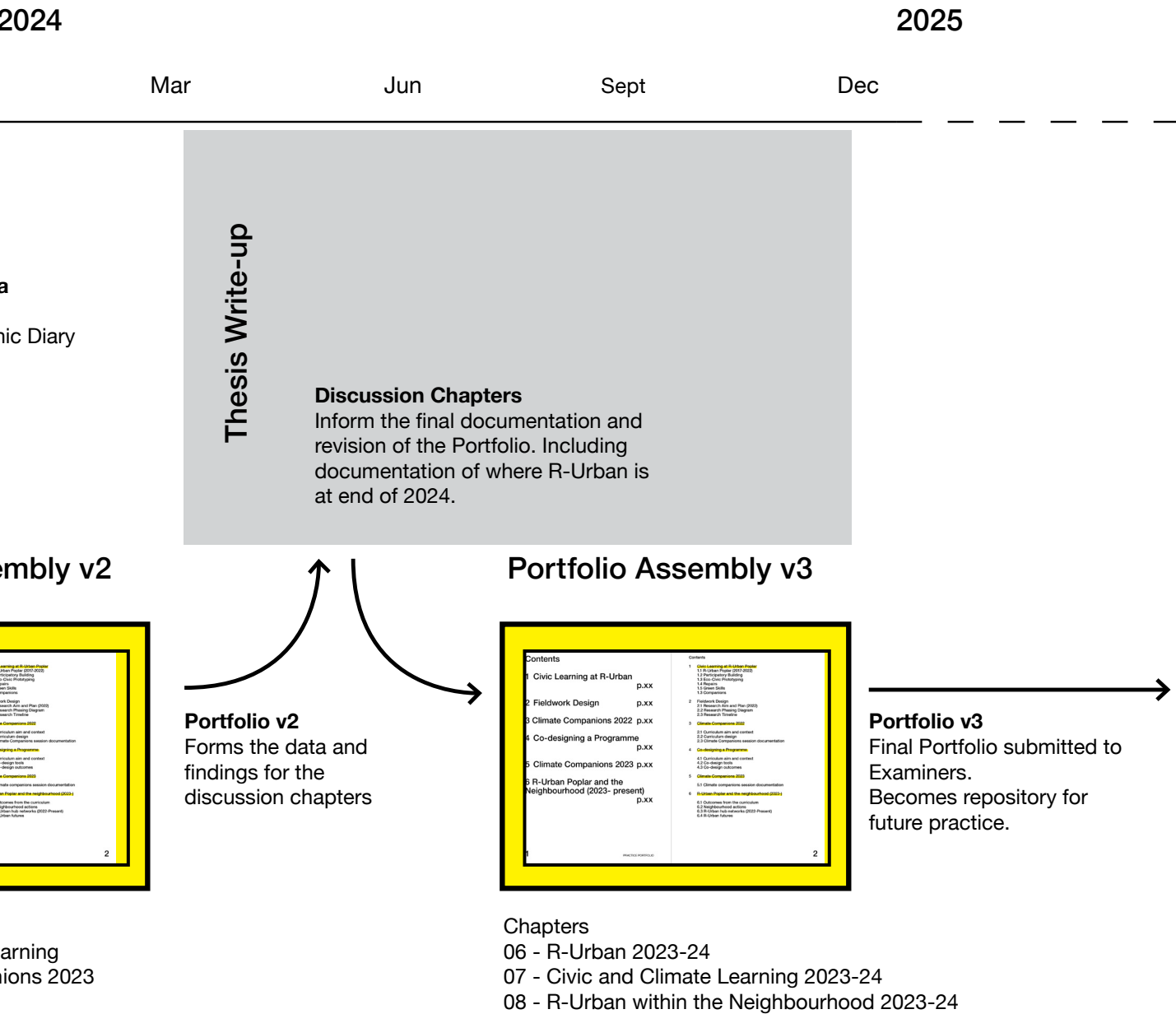
Figure 28 - Practice Portfolio Reader

was a first reflection and understanding which has subsequently formed the basis of the discussion chapters.

Robin Nelson (2013) describes this documentary process as “capturing moments of insight” (p.29). In this case, it brought together photography, autoethnographic diary extracts in one place. The addition of architectural representation and analytical drawings (Tayob, 2018) became an exploratory tool to analyse ‘spaces of civic learning’ adding layers of understanding and further lines of inquiry for post-evaluation interviews. The notation form and initial reflections are mainly bullet points, reflecting

their in process nature and capture my thoughts at time of production (v1, v2 and v3).

More recently, I’ve returned to this document in Version 3 (v3) during the write-up, taking a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach, the findings and discussion of this thesis are informed in the constant back and forth between this portfolio, the interview transcripts, films and the findings. The design portfolio is one part of the ‘body of evidence’ of the practice, and I encourage the reader to engage with the materials in this way.



i.
R-Urban
2017-22

R-Urban Poplar (2017-2022)

Hub Timeline

- 2017 - Arrive at Brion Place in the Summer of 2017, temporary site allocation with plan to relocate to Bromley Hall Road site in 2018 as part of Poplar Works Development. Run programmes of civic engagement with Teviot residents around participatory building and the Off-Grid Anaerobic Digester project.
- 2018 - Future site on Bromley Hall Road falls through, begin negotiations with Poplar HARCA (Landowner) to remain at current location, little hub activity due to lack of funding and project uncertainty. Start the Poplar Detox project, which explores local air pollution and prototypes nature-based solutions in response.
- 2019 - Sign a 5-year peppercorn lease (Free in exchange for common good purpose) for carpark and garage site at Brion Place. Begin development of hub infrastructures and build site growing spaces, compost toilet, install mains water and power on site. Run a series of Summer School programmes on site with architecture schools and local youth centre focussing on DIY skills, Re-Use and Prototyping.
- 2020 - Public programming disrupted due to Covid-19. Offer out free allotment beds for residents during the pandemic, to allow local food growing (5 residents growing food on site). Start conversion of garage units into workspaces through participatory build project with Volunteer-it-Yourself.
- 2021 - Become a lab partner in the Women Environmental Network's (Wen) Just Food and Climate Transition project to develop circular food systems. Start the public programme on green skills and companions as part of the project. Increase the number of families growing food on site to 10.
- 2022 - Build the covered workshop space and start the weekly repairs programme in March. Continue to expand green skills and companions programme with more regular sessions including co-managing a new community growing project at Teviot Centre.

Hub Infrastructures

- 2017 - Kitchen, AD, Classroom, Tool Library
- 2018 - Moss Wall
- 2019 - Compost Toilet, Power And Water, Communal Growing Bed, Raised Bed Allotment Plots, Greywater Treatment Beds, Communal Dining Table
- 2020 - Garage Workspaces (5)
- 2021 - Ridan Composter, Additional Raised Bed Allotments
- 2022 - Covered Workshop, Additional Garage Workspaces (2)

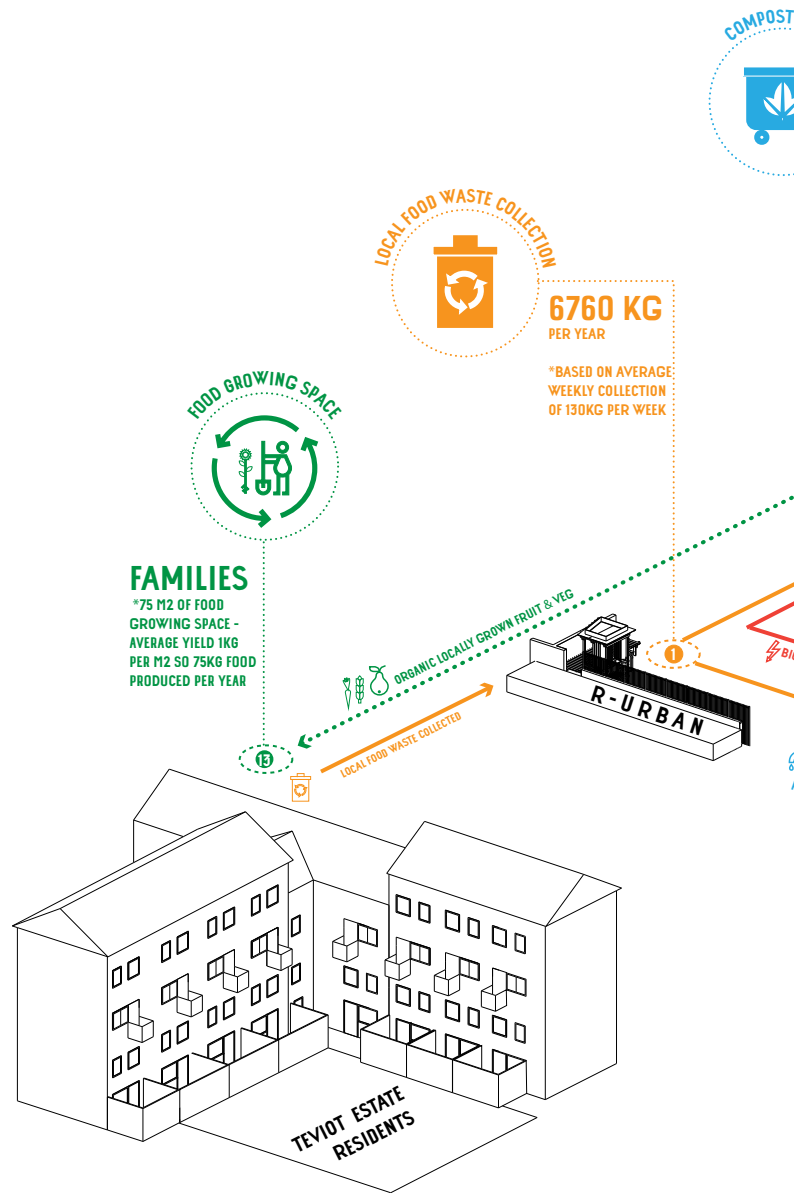
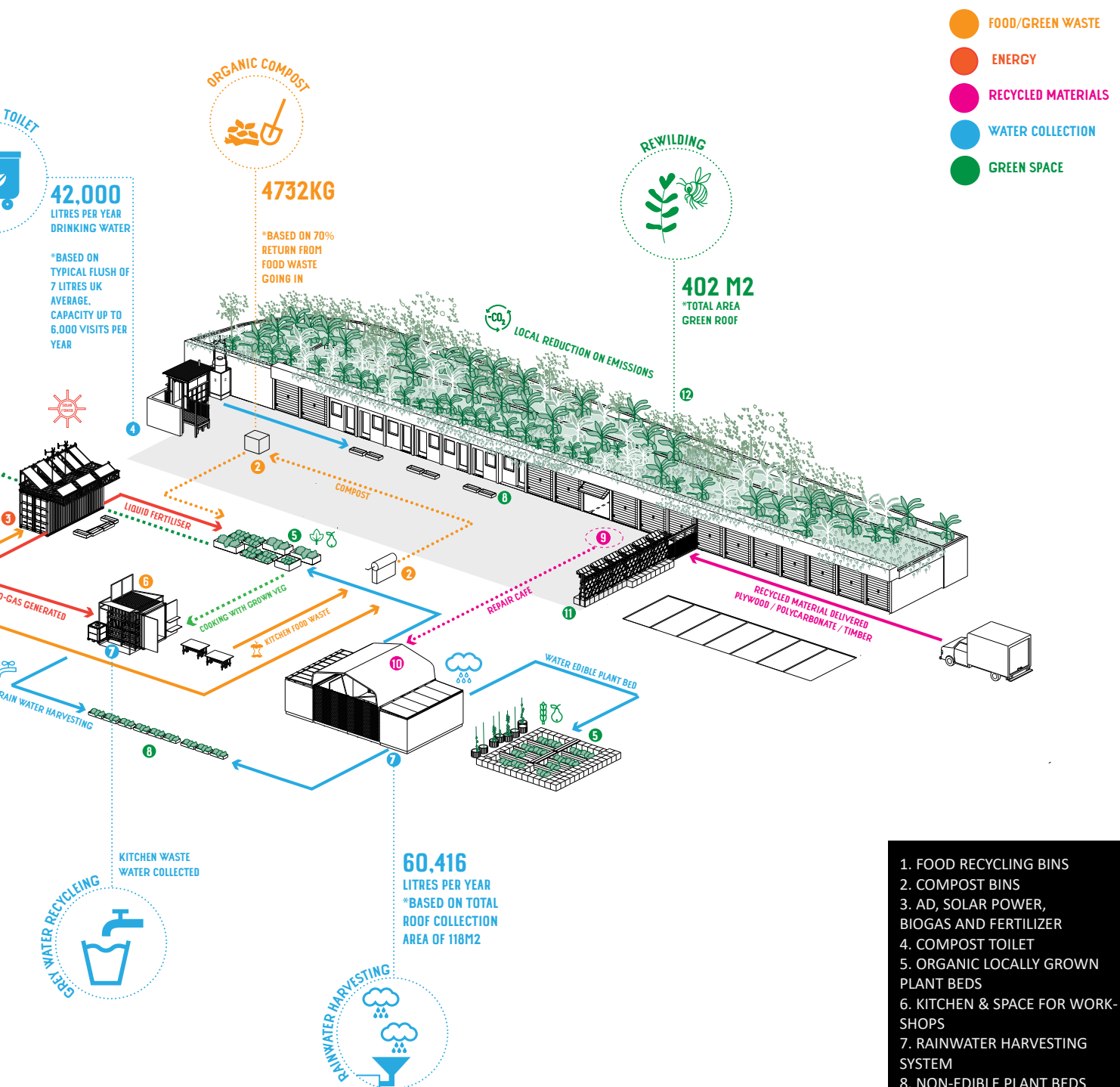


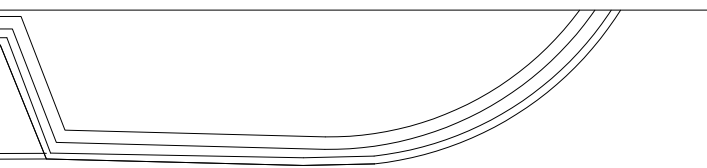
Figure 29 - Ecological Cycles and Savings R-Urban Poplar 2022.



1. FOOD RECYCLING BINS
2. COMPOST BINS
3. AD, SOLAR POWER, BIOGAS AND FERTILIZER
4. COMPOST TOILET
5. ORGANIC LOCALLY GROWN PLANT BEDS
6. KITCHEN & SPACE FOR WORKSHOPS
7. RAINWATER HARVESTING SYSTEM
8. NON-EDIBLE PLANT BEDS
9. DELIVERY POINT
10. REPAIR CAFE & TOOLS LIBRARY
11. MOSS WALLS
12. GREEN ROOF
13. TEVIOT ESTATE RESIDENTS

R-Urban Poplar 2017





Hub Timeline

- ☉ Temporary Occupation of the site before lease arranged. No secure perimeter, garages mainly filled with waste/junk from flytipping.
- ☉ Containerised site infrastructures brought in via HIAB truck, initial starter funding provided by Poplar HARCA to run some initial programmes and engage residents.

Figure 30 - R-Urban Poplar Site Plan 2017

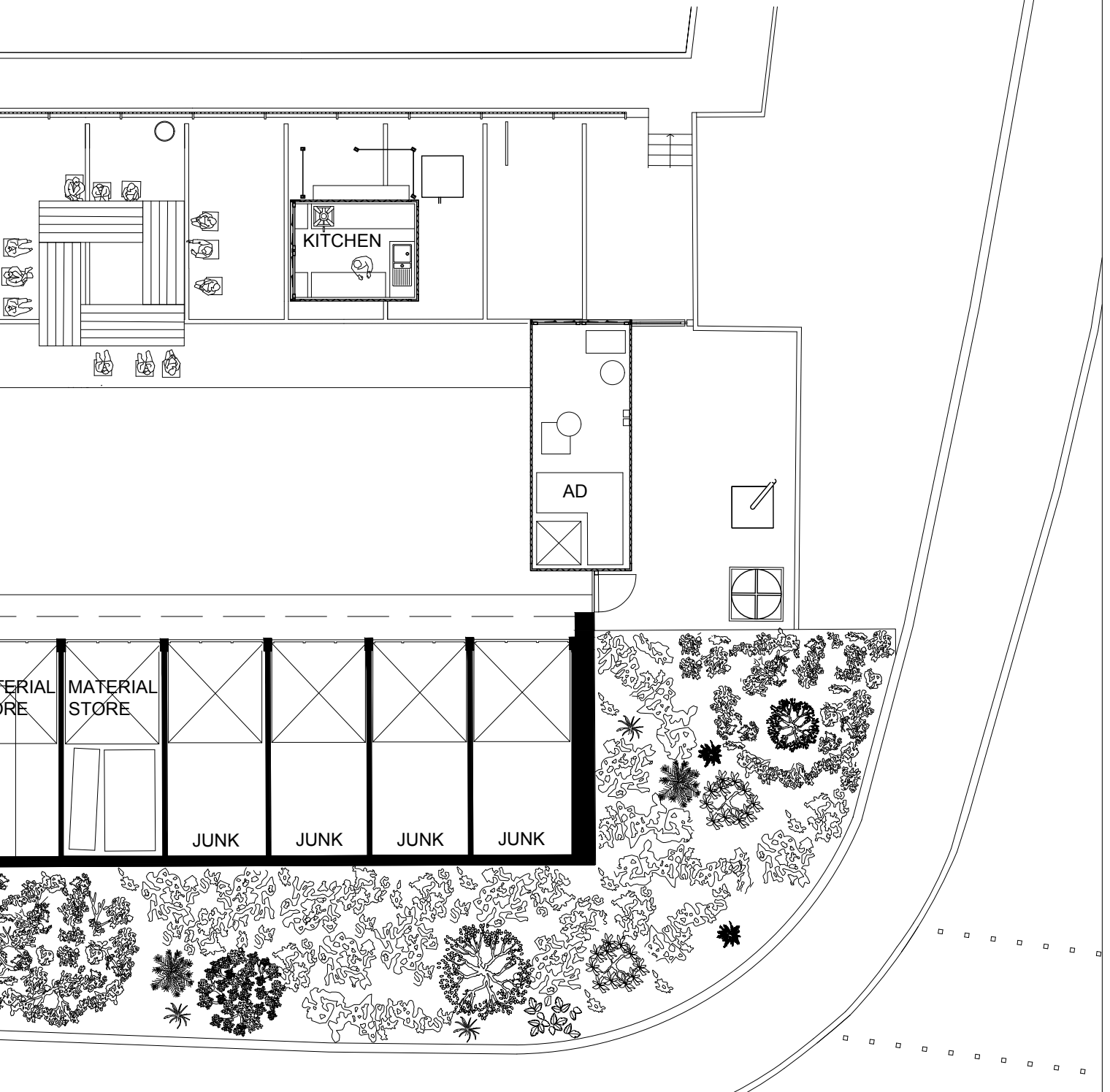


Figure 31 - R-Urban Poplar 2017. The Arrival from
Hackney Wick.
Source: public works





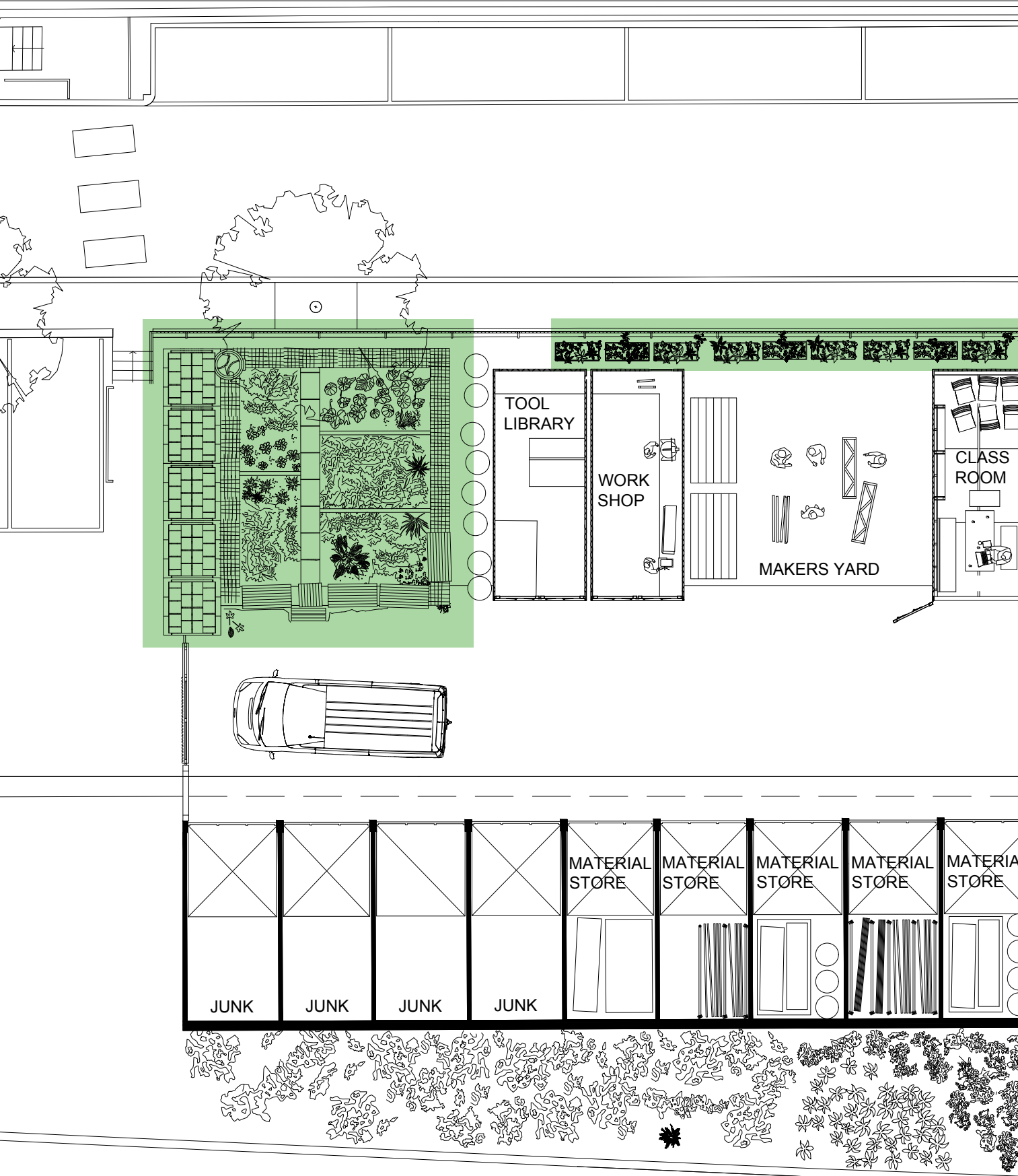
COMING SOON

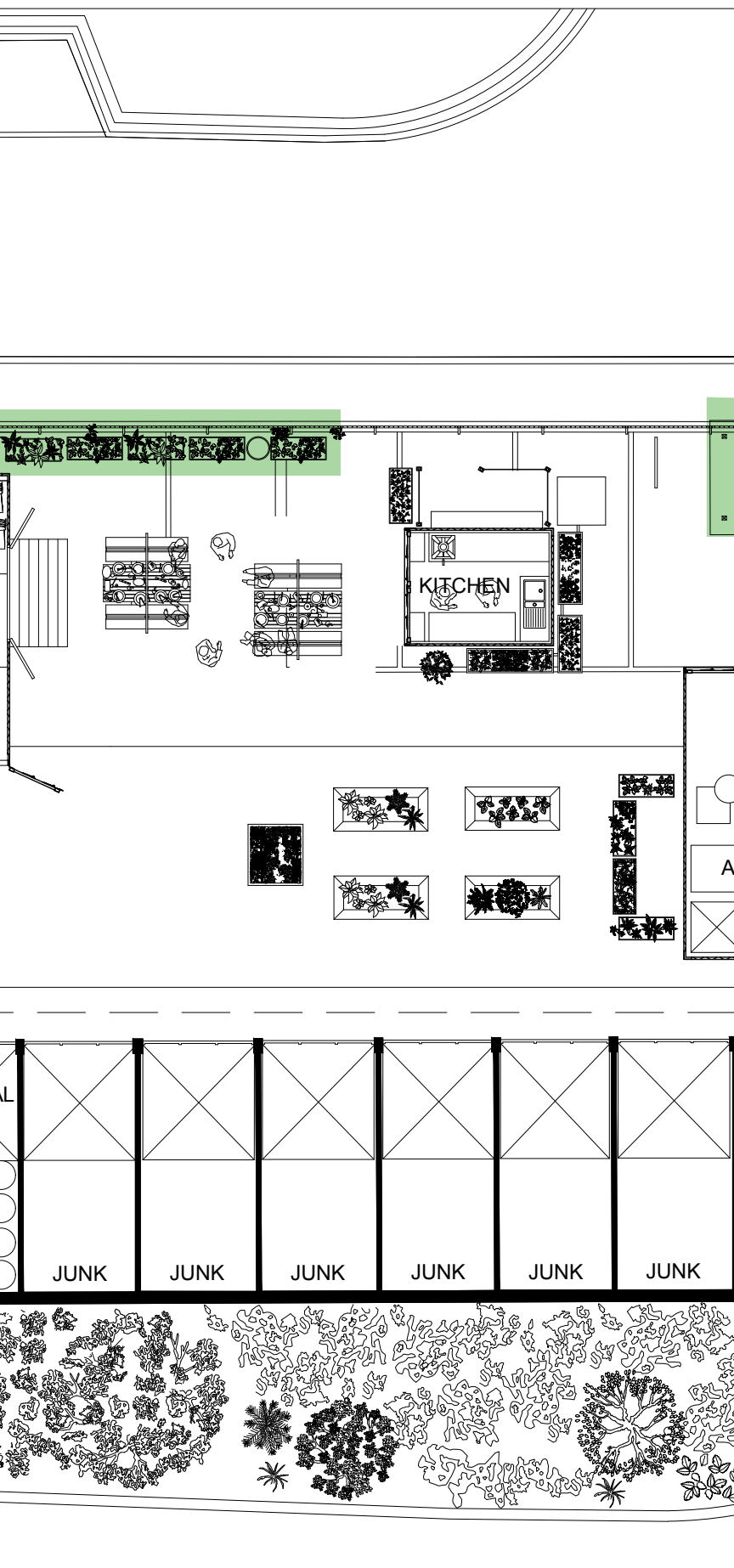
RURBAN

DOPLAR

103

R-Urban Poplar 2019





Hub Timeline

- Planning Permission granted by LBTH, temporary permission for 5-year site occupation.
- Funding provided by Veolia Environmental Trust and GLA Greener Cities fund for initial site works and improving accessibility (Highlighted in green).
- Garages remain vacant or used for material storage.

Figure 32 - R-Urban Poplar Site Plan 2019.

Figure 33 - R-Urban Poplar Anaerobic Digester 2019
Source: public works



WER

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DIGESTER

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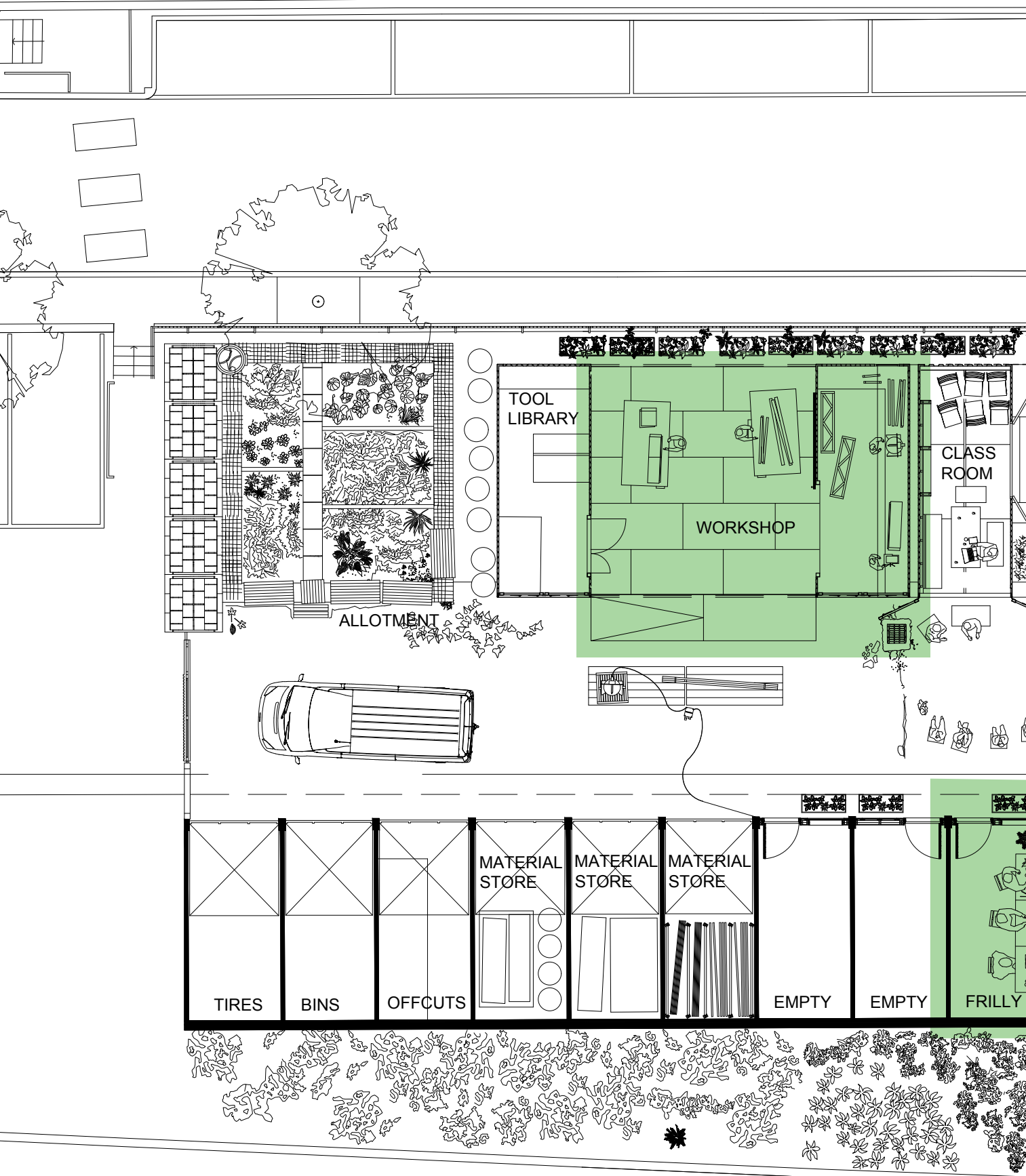
2M³
BIOGAS
PER DAY

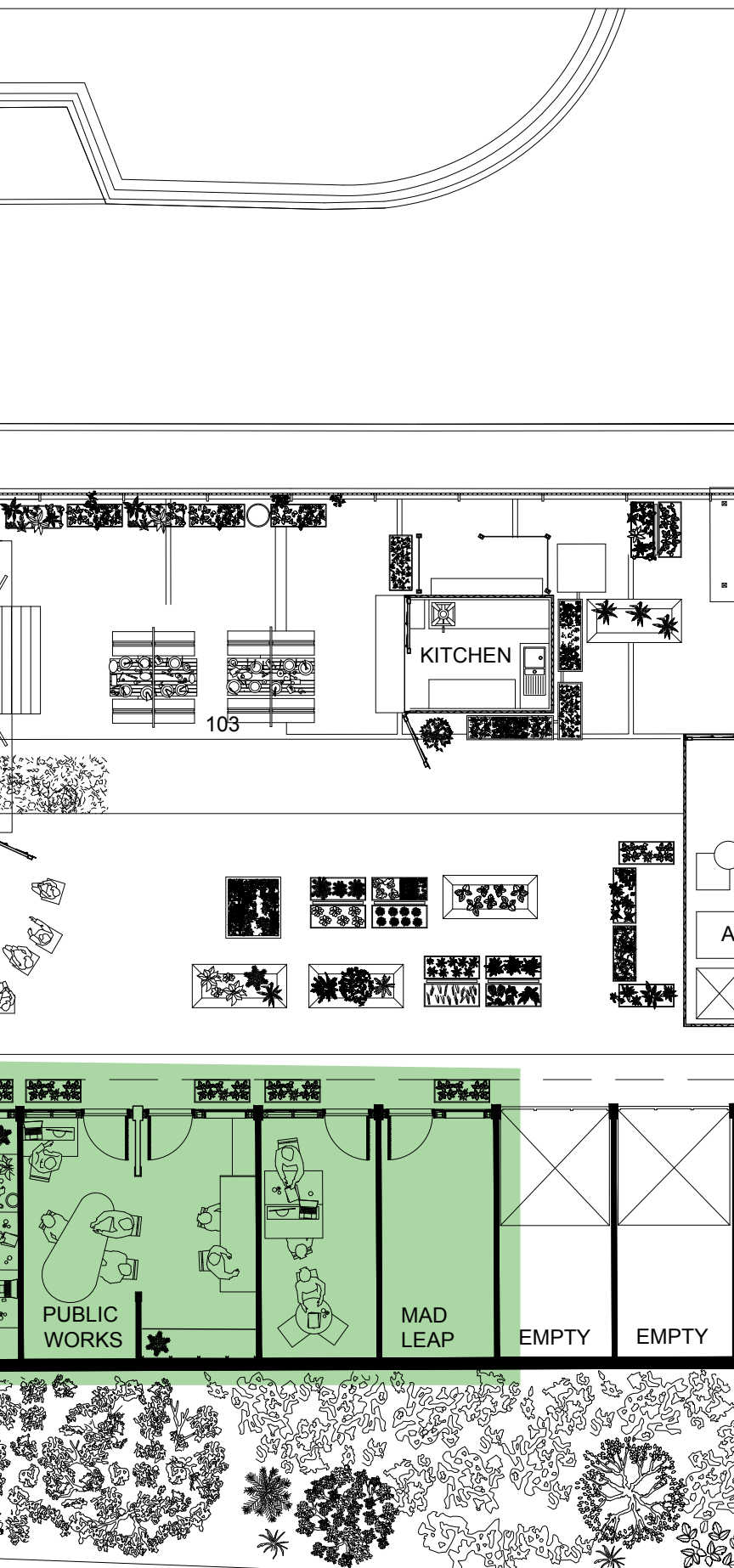
8.1 HOURS
COOKING

RE-
USE
RURBAN



R-Urban Poplar 2021





Hub Timeline

- ☉ Public works invest COVID recovery grant in converting the garages into workspaces for local businesses and enterprises who work with sustainability. Public works relocates office to R-Urban in 2021.
- ☉ Additional capital reserves invested in building a covered workshop space, to enable further fabrication of site and other projects within London.

Figure 34 - R-Urban Poplar Site Plan 2021.

Figure 35 - R-Urban Poplar 2021 - Bangla Feast
Source: public works

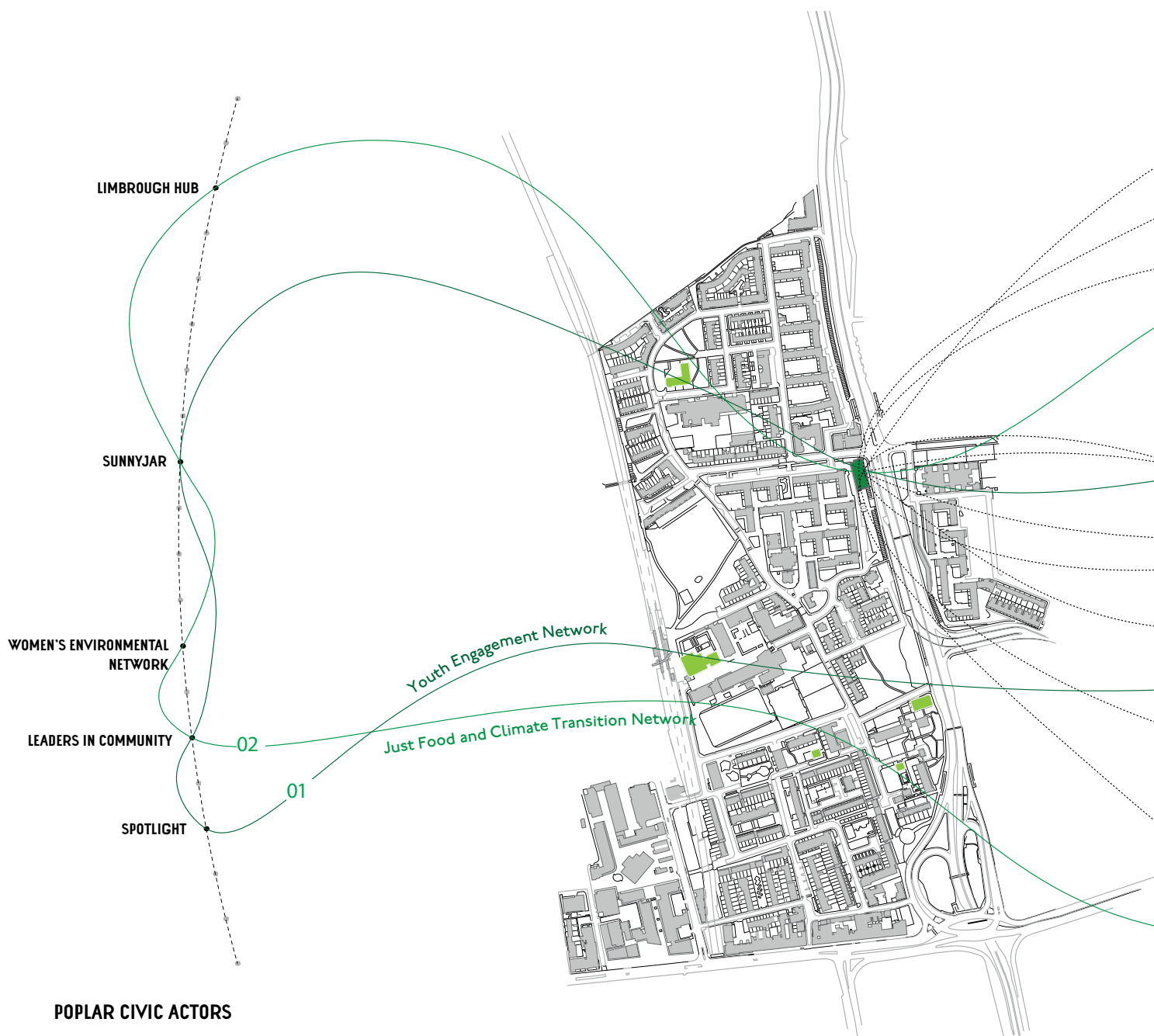




Relationscape R-Urban 2021

RELATIONAL NETWORKS

- 01 - Youth Engagement Network
- 02 - Just Food and Climate Transition
- 03 - R-Urban European Network
- 04 - Tower Hamlets Air Quality Network
- 05 - Anaerobic Digester and Food Systems
- 06 - Hub Construction



Relationscape Analysis

In 2021 R-Urban Poplar was still re-emerging from the CV19 pandemic, and therefore networks and civic partners within Poplar were limited. JustFACT was a significant local network to join and enabled significant expansion of existing work around food systems to emerge. Youth Engagement programmes in collaboration with local centres were important in expanding audiences, but were limited at this stage.

Most relational ties were through public works, highlighting key role in initiating the hub, the practice was often the connecting node between

different scales of actors, and could leverage European support through project networks such as R-Urban and through innovation grants via actors of urban change.

The relationscape in 2021 clearly shows the hub in its infancy, working within a limited number of networks and with only 4 primary site stakeholders.

Figure 36 - R-Urban Poplar Relationscape Mapping 2021

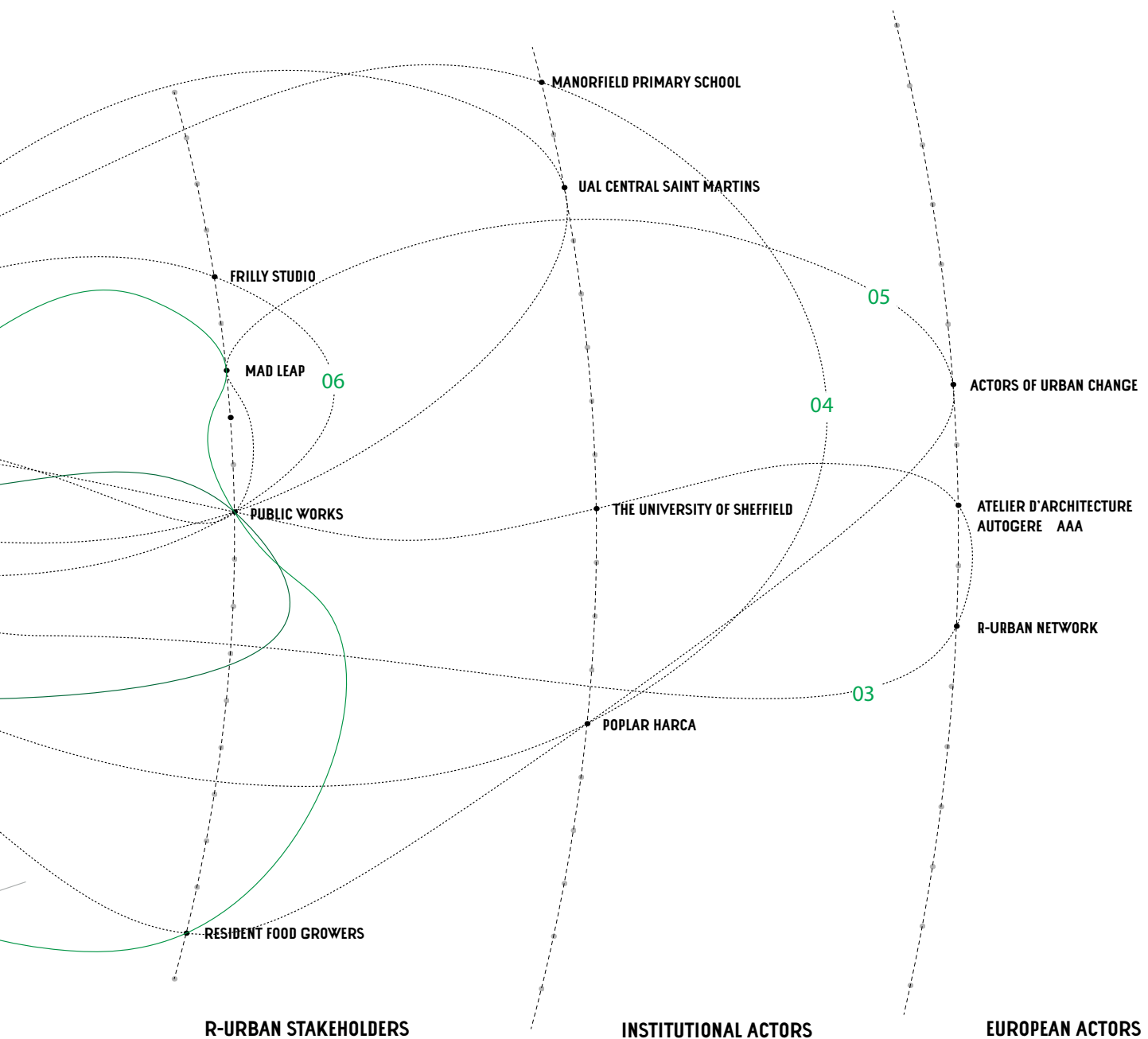


Figure 37 - R-Urban Poplar 20222 - Converted Garage Offices





Civic and Climate Learning 2017-22 (before CC)

Repairs

What – public programme of workshops which teach participants different repair skills (textile, pottery, electronics, woodwork) for broken/damaged goods

When – A bi-weekly programme throughout the year at the R-Urban workshop and tool library (2022)

Facilitators – Sessions were facilitated by members of public works (architects), SunnyJar Eco Hub (a low-waste living CIC), and invited guest repairers'

Type of learning, knowledge shared/produced
– Each workshop focussed on teaching participants the skills they would require to fix broken appliances, clothing, furniture etc. Unlike repair cafes which offer users a free repair service these sessions focussed on developing skills e.g. sewing, darning, upholstering, wood-work, computer building. In learning the skills participants were also engaged in a wider conversation around sustainability of consumption and circularity.

AIM:

Teach repairs skills and learn about upcycling, re-use and low-impact consumption

Outputs – Participants would be able to apply newly learnt skills in home settings or identify further training required to complete repairs. Goods/items repaired and continue to be used rather than disposed of (e.g. darned/repared clothing)



Figure 38 - Computer building workshop



Figure 39 - Patchwork clothing repairs workshop

Participatory Building

What - Following our arrival on site in 2017 the project invited local residents, students and the wider network to help co-construct hub infrastructures through an open workshop programme.

When - Sessions took place intermittently between 2017-2019, often for short periods (one week summer schools with universities) or participatory build days with estate residents and members of the R-Urban mailing list.

Facilitators - Sessions were facilitated by public works members (architects), often in collaboration with other experts (welders, engineers, hobbyists) identified through the R-Urban network in relation to specific project needs.

Type of learning, knowledge shared/produced - Learning in these workshops was always by doing, by getting hands-on with materials, tools and equipment in a volunteer build process. Participants learnt or shared DIY skills (e.g. how to use a drill, how to cut timber with a

AIM:
Teach DIY
Skills and
learn about
material
re-use and
natural
building systems

straight edge etc). The sessions also focussed on ecological (low-impact building systems) or material re-use involving the harvesting and upcycling of 'waste' construction materials.

Outputs - The sessions would equip participants with new life skills which could have further application in the personal/civic arena (DIY skills). Equally it helps to advocate for sustainable building methods which encourage less waste and valuing re-use. The hub would also benefit from the development of new site infrastructures (tables, chairs, classroom container)



Figure 40 - Arriving in Poplar (2017). Enzo Mari Building workshop
Source: public works



Figure 41 - Summer School (2019) - Tower building workshop
Source: public works

Eco-Civic Prototyping

What – public programmes of events, talks, workshops and build days to develop and test prototypes which address circularity or urban challenges e.g. air pollution, food waste disposal, grey water systems

When – Sessions have taken place intermittently from 2017-2022 in conjunction with specific project related funding:

- Off-Grid Anaerobic Digester (AD) (2017-19) – Prototyping of a micro AD which would be able to run off-grid using renewable energy sources.
- Moss Wall (2018-19) – Prototyping a nature based solution for improving localised air quality by using moss as a natural living filter. (Version 01 2018, Version 02 + 03, 2019)
- Greywater system (2019-Present) – prototyping a grey-water filtration system for the R-Urban Kitchen. (Version 01 – 2019, Version 02 – 2023*)
- Hydroponic Food Growing Tower (2021-22) – an open-source design, which was developed, tested and assembled using off the shelf plumbing components (Version 01 2021, Version 02, 2022)

Facilitators – Sessions were facilitated by public works members (architects) and MAD LEAP CIC (engineers working with circular food systems). Prototypes would often be designed in consultation with partner universities including

AIM:

Engage in co-making of circular systems through project based prototypes

(University of East London, University of the Arts London, University College London).

Type of learning, knowledge shared/produced

– Sessions were a mixture of getting hands-on helping to the build or model prototypes or they focussed on urban education, highlighting the connection between urban challenges and the circular prototypes which we hoped would help to address the identified problem.

Outputs – Participants learnt about circular design in addressing specific urban challenges (food waste, air quality, wastewater, urban food growing). Participants also learnt or developed new skills in construction and design.



Figure 42 - Situated Drawing, "Performing Digestion 2" Building an off-grid anaerobic digester 2019
Source: public works

Green skills

What – public programme of workshops which teach participants horticultural skills for food growing, alongside a regular green skills garden volunteering session on the shared food growing beds at R-Urban.

When - A bi-weekly programme throughout the year at the hub (2021-Present) and in 2022 in collaboration with the Teviot Garden, run by Leaders in Community.

Facilitators – Session are facilitated by MAD LEAP CIC (circular food enterprise) and project stakeholder. Occasional invited guests to address specific knowledge gaps e.g. soil health.

Type of learning, knowledge shared/produced – Sessions would tackle specific garden skills or knowledge gaps e.g. planting and caring for specific crops, learning how to compost green



Figure 43 - Insects, diseases and pests workshop (2021) Learning how to maximise plant health.
Source: public works

AIM:
Learn
horticultural
skills for
community
food growing and
composting

waste, learning how to identify plant diseases and common pests. Alongside the skills sessions helped to frame the relationship between climate justice and community food growing/gardening.

Outputs – Participants were able to apply skills on individual or collective growing plots. Many participants joined a community composting scheme for green and household food waste which is managed by R-Urban.



Figure 44 - Compost club (2022) - Learning about maintaining and managing compost heaps
Source: public works

Companions

What – a series of community meals and food workshops, which aim to teach participants about food justice, food waste and share food cultures.

When – Sessions have taken place regularly from 2021-Present with monthly workshops from March-October. However, food and community meals have been used in different creative forms from 2017 onwards.

Facilitators – Workshops and meals are organised by members of public works, but the sessions are facilitated by an extensive network of residents, R-Urban members and invited guest cooks.

Type of learning, knowledge shared/produced – Primarily the sessions aim to engage audiences in conversations around food justice and circularity. This could be through workshops which specifically addresses topics such as low-waste cooking (e.g. pickling and preserving workshops)

AIM:
Share
food cultures,
learn about
sustainable
food practices,
bring diverse
communities
together

or often centre community feasts which aim to share food cultures through the communal preparation and sharing of food.

Outputs – Participants may take home culinary skills and tips to repeat workshops/recipes within the home. However, the primary output from the programme is community connection and togetherness. Creating a space where diverse communities can exchange cultures and share space together around a community meal.



Figure 45 - Bangla Feast (2021) - Community cooking workshop with local chef host.
Source: public works

ii.

Climate Companions 2022

CC22 Programme Design

Aim

The programme aim was shaped by two mutual interests, the PhD Research design and the desire within R-Urban team to explore more reflective and critical pedagogies within the hub. The programme was seen as an evolution of the civic learning to date, bringing together the multiple strands (Participatory Building, Prototyping, Repairs, Green Skills and Companions) into one two-week programme which addressed the wider neighbourhood of Poplar and critical framing around climate action.

"Climate Companions will explore our local neighbourhood, finding ways we can critically and creatively engage with climate change, and build new companions for care and action.

Inspired by Climate Care in Berlin, this two week learning festival aims to bring together a group (of "companions") who are passionate about Poplar and the environment to develop new skills, tools and knowledge, to move towards a more caring future for the neighbourhood and planet.

We're interested in how care is a form of action and an ethical approach to tackling climate change in cities. We see acts of care emerging in the neighbourhood; whether it's caring with/for others, caring for green spaces or caring with others species.

This festival is an opportunity to bring together citizens, activists, and artists, to come together to co-create a collective learning experience. That will give us new tools and skills to live beyond our current moment of crisis and build new companionships to support future relations."

Page 2 - Climate Companions Programme

CLIMATE COMPANIONS

AUG 31 -
SEPT 11

SCAN OR
CLICK ME



TO SIGNUP



TWO WEEK FESTIVAL OF LEARNING
PERFORMANCES - WORKSHOPS -
MEALS - WALKS - TALKS - BUILDS

Figure 46 - Climate Companions Programme Flyer

Open-call

After setting the original aim for the programme the R-Urban team invited regular members and attendees to respond to an open-call for workshop or session ideas as part of the Climate Companions festival of learning. In the monthly newsletter (July) the open-call was published using a Google form, inviting ideas and proposals for sessions. The intention was to expand our network of session facilitators and respond to learning needs within the wider community. This call received no responses and a new curatorial approach was required.

Climate Care this September, Open Call

Inspired by the work of Soft agency/Floating Berlin and their climate care festival in Berlin, we're planning our own festival of learning at R-Urban and in Poplar this September.

From the 01-11 September we plan on hosting a series of workshops, events, meals and activities which engage with the local neighbourhood of Poplar and climate change. We're interested in how care is a form of action and an ethical approach to tackling climate change in Poplar. We see acts of care emerging in Poplar, whether it's caring with others, caring for green spaces or caring with others species.

For two weeks we want to bring together a community who want to engage with this subject and tackle it in creative and empowering ways. We'll be getting to know our neighbourhood, learning new skills and creatively engaging with local climate care.

We also want to hear from all our local members and participants, do you have an idea for a workshop or session you'd like to share as part of the festival? It could be a session you'd like to host or simply suggesting an idea you'd like to see take place.

To submit an idea to our open call please get in touch via this [google form](#)



Figure 47 - Open-call out via R-Urban mailing list

Mobilising the existing network

01 July 2022

Following the disappointing response from the open-call we adapted the curatorial approach, focussing on the learning formats the R-Urban team wanted to test for the trail pedagogy.

11 July 2022

Programme Co-design workshop with R-Urban public programme team (Anghard and Cameron)

Workshop Formats to try/use for the festival:

Learning-by-doing

- ☉ Hands on, task based learning
- ☉ Learning and practising new skills

Awakening our senses

- ☉ Embodied ways of learning through sensory experiences e.g. listening, soundscape workshops
- ☉ Learning through multi-species lens

Performing

- ☉ Building community through performative events and actions e.g. discursive dinners, community feast/banquet

Rooting in Poplar

- ☉ Understanding our context (physical and social)
- ☉ History Walks? Engaging with the heritage and how the urban context has changed

Reflective spaces

- ☉ Space to critically reflect on experiences, challenges associated with climate change in the neighbourhood (discussions)
- ☉ Talks and presentations from experts

Taken from collaborative Google Doc - 230711_
Climate Companions Planning

12 July - 12 August 2022

Following the co-design meeting we then invited our existing network of facilitators and project partners to respond to an invitation to host a session as part of the programme. This was a fairly open invitation, allowing collaborators to develop or test new ideas through the festival.

"Hi Zoe, Hi Dan.

Hope you're all well and not melting in this wonderful/terrifying heat!

In the first two weeks of September (01-11th) we're planning what we've called a festival of learning at R-Urban. It's called climate care and plans to engage with our on-going climate emergency at the scale of the neighbourhood in Poplar. We hope it will be an experimental opportunity to test new workshop ideas, formats which engage with ideas of care and the environment. I wrote a very draft google doc which I hope to publish more widely next week.

But first, I wanted to reach out to all our existing collaborators to see if there is interest in taking part or hosting a workshop (this could be something you already have prepared or is totally new). Happy to discuss any ideas over the phone/in-person or via email of course.

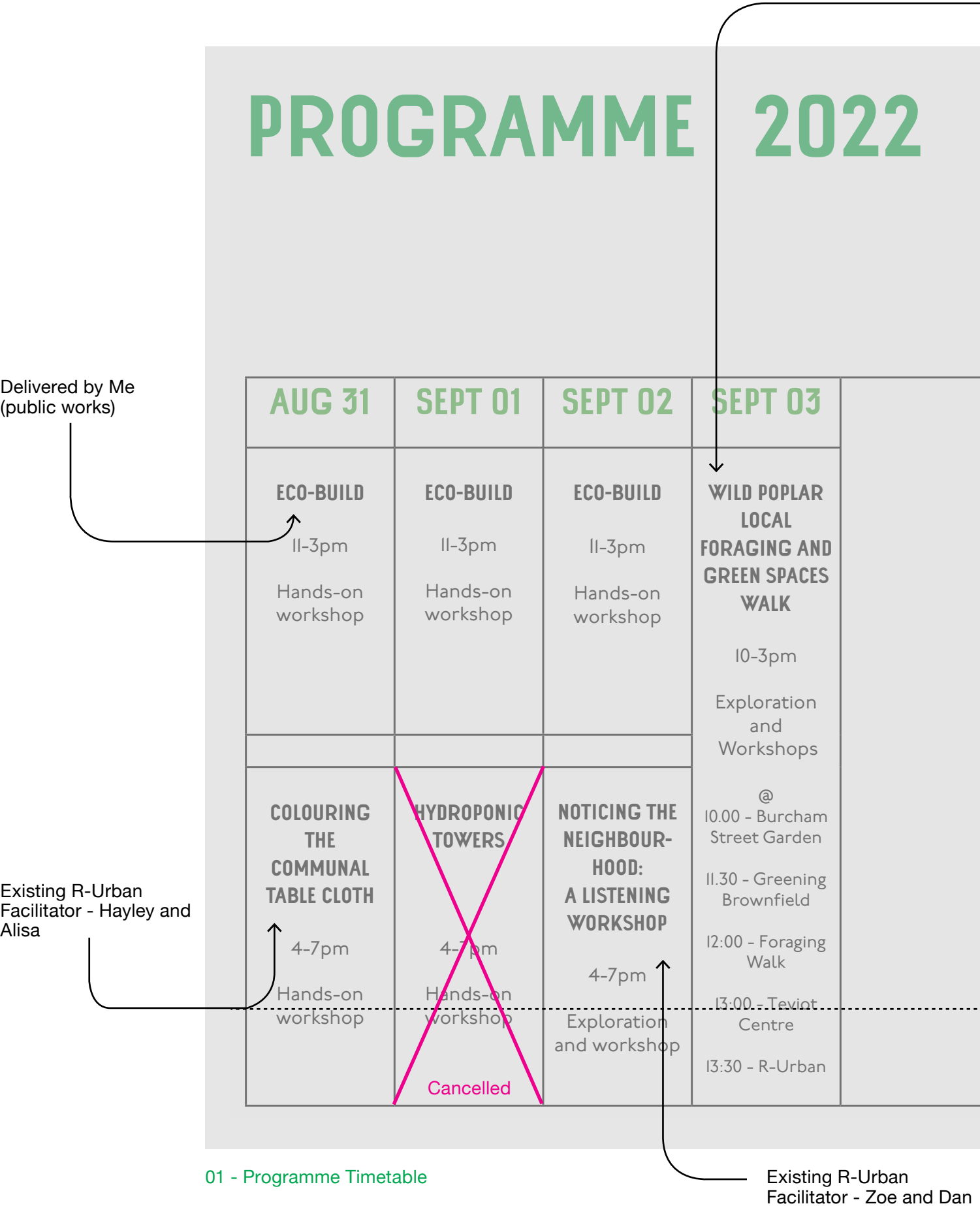
We have a small budget to cover the costs for workshop facilitators and hosts during this programme - so it would be a paid opportunity, and happy to also align with other work you have going on. We discussed previously about a follow up listening workshop, perhaps with less discussion and more engaged listening practices in the neighbourhood?

Warmly (literally!)

Andy

Email introduction to the Climate Companions project

CC22 Programme



New R-Urban facilitator - Ru Kenyon

All workshops are for free and take place at R-Urban Poplar, unless otherwise stated in the programme.

Under 16s must be supervised by parents/guardians

If you want to book your place onto a workshop please scan/ click on this QR code.

SCAN ME



TO SIGNUP

SEPT 07	SEPT 08	SEPT 09	SEPT 10	SEPT 11
ECO-BUILD 11-3pm Hands-on workshop	MOSSY WALK MOSSY TALK 11-1pm Exploration	ECO-BUILD 11-3pm Hands-on workshop	PLASTIC FREE POPLAR: COMPANION FAMILIES 10-1pm Hands-on workshop	
ADORNING THE COMMUNAL TABLE CLOTH 4-7pm Hands-on workshop	SOIL SECRETS 4-7pm Hands-on workshop	SEED HARVESTING AND GUERILLA GARDENING 4-7pm Hands-on workshop		COMPANIONS DIGEST: A COL- LECTIVE FEAST 4-7pm Meal

Existing R-Urban
partner, SunnyJar
Ecohub

Facilitated by
public works

Existing R-Urban
Facilitator,
gardener and
resident - Katrina

New R-Urban facilitator - Compost Mentis



Figure 49 - Wild Poplar - Learning about the Linden tree
Source: Nana Maolini



Eco-Build



Figure 50 - Building moulds for Hempcrete and Mycelium Bricks
Source: Nana Maolini

LOCATION R-URBAN POPLAR

DATE AUGUST 31, SEPTEMBER 01, 02, 07, 09 2022

TIME 11:00-15:00

WORKSHOP LEAD Andy Belfield

PARTICIPANTS 30 total across all sessions

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

" Learn all about eco-building techniques and making through these daily drop-in DIY sessions. We'll work with Hempcrete, timber and mycelium building systems to realise prototypes for low carbon futures.

No previous skills required, all ages welcome - under 16s must be supervised by parent/guardian. Volunteer lunch provided at 1pm."

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

"The workshop focus was on hempcrete and mycelium. I gave a rambling spiel about hemp as a building material and its eco credentials ... "it sequesters more carbon than trees ... it's a great insulator ... lime is much less carbon intensive than cement..."

It turns out that one participant is an absolute pro and has run these making workshops for students before using hemp which is a relief because I'm approaching it as an enthusiastic amateur.

Most of these sessions are skill sessions, teaching participants how to use tools correctly, most have never used power drills or saws before, and this can be an empowering experience to learn.

Alongside our hemp experiments we also test Mycelium grown bricks ... a "strange cross over from the kitchen" says a participant. The intention is to test natural building processes for future builds, but I'm unclear about how these could be adapted into future projects as yet."

Spaces of Civic Learning

● The workshop facility is a container construction, with a shared raised level deck enclosure under a protective canopy. This multi-functional deck can be used for everyday making, workshops, talks and events

● Unlike most of the curriculum sessions Eco-Builds took place over a longer duration from 11:00-15:00, allowing a greater flexibility in the use of space across site. Sessions started in a relaxed manner with cups of tea and reflections on the previous days' learnings for new starters. These would take place around the communal dining tables and kitchen space before relocating to the workshop to get hands on with the practical workshop elements.

● The types of construction required several spaces, tools and equipment to facilitate their production. Workshop benches were ideal for the construction of moulds and formwork for the casting process. Whilst not entirely necessary the canopy covered workshop space was a flexible and breathable space which hosted the workshops well.

● The messy nature of casting hemp and the need for ventilation meant most of the hemp and lime mortar mixing took place in the garden space.

● Lunches provided a natural reflective break in the middle of the day to catchup between working groups, discuss progress and reflect on the making in progress.

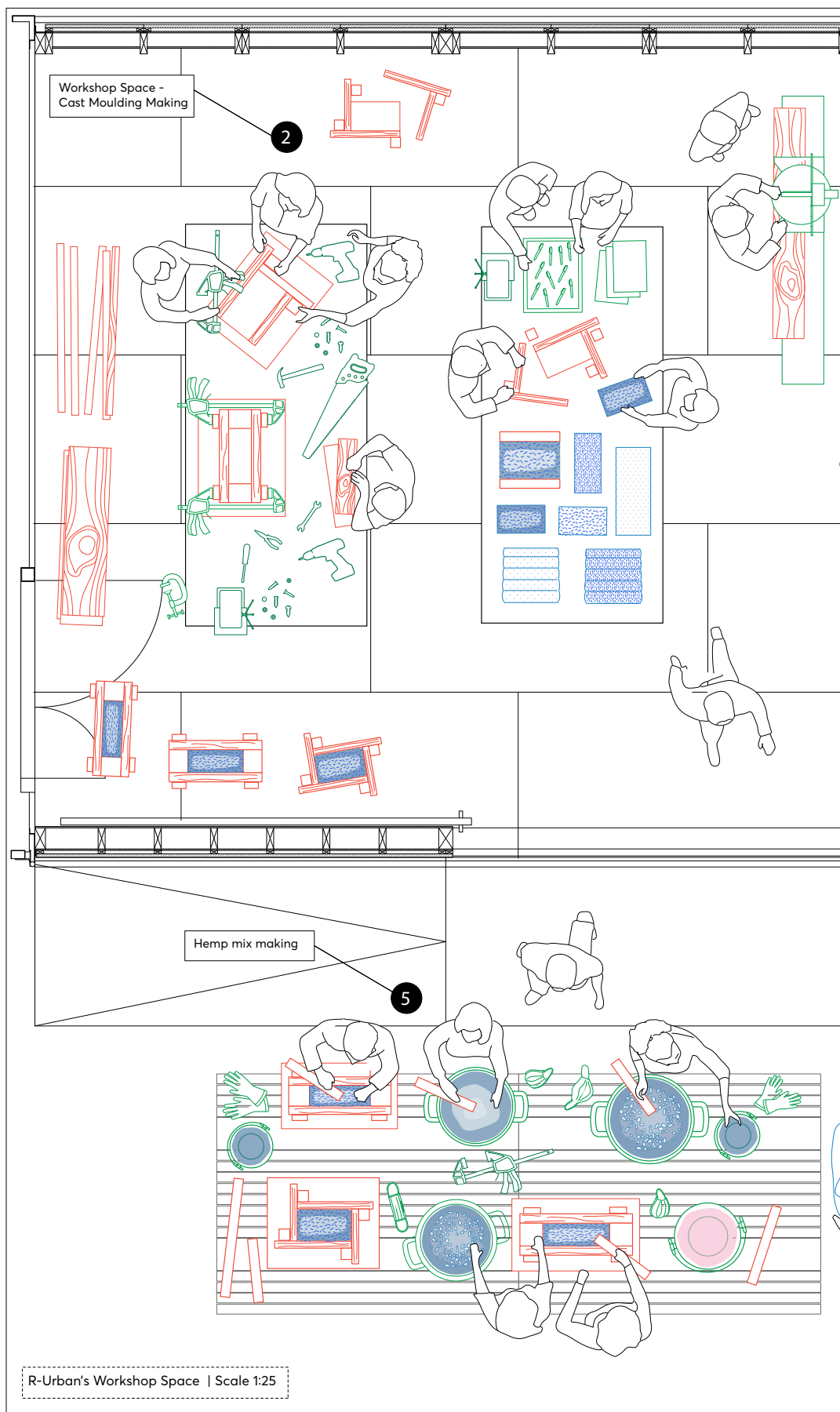


Figure 51 - Space-use analysis for Eco-Build Workshop Programmes

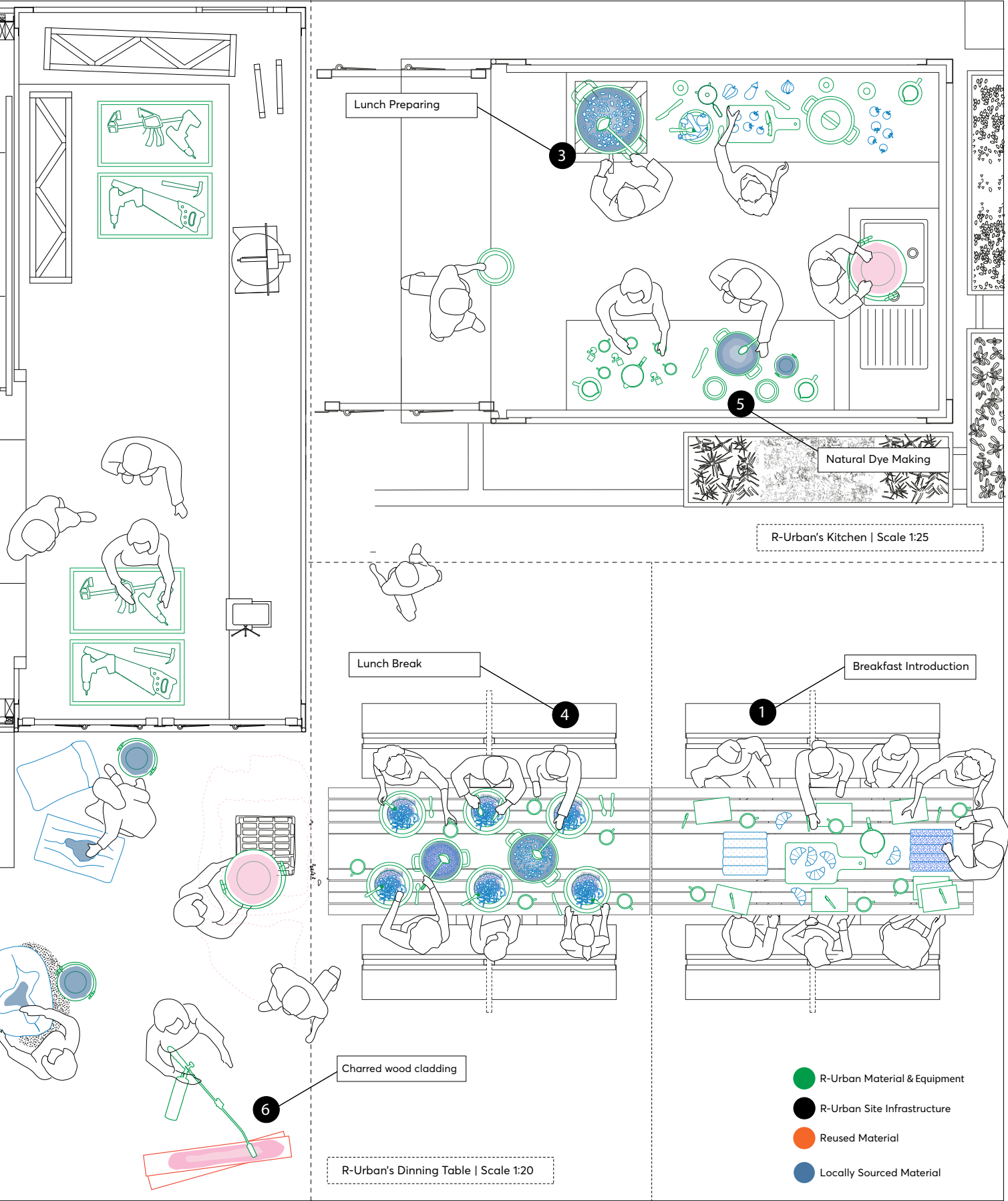




Figure 52 - Co-making the formwork



Figure 53 - Mixing and tamping the hempcrete mix



Figure 54 - Hempcrete Block Mixes - increased lime and sand



Figure 55 - Mixing mushroom spores with hemp



Figure 56 - Hempcrete Block with Natural dyes (Indigo)



Figure 57 - Mycelium living bricks
Source: Marc Cowan

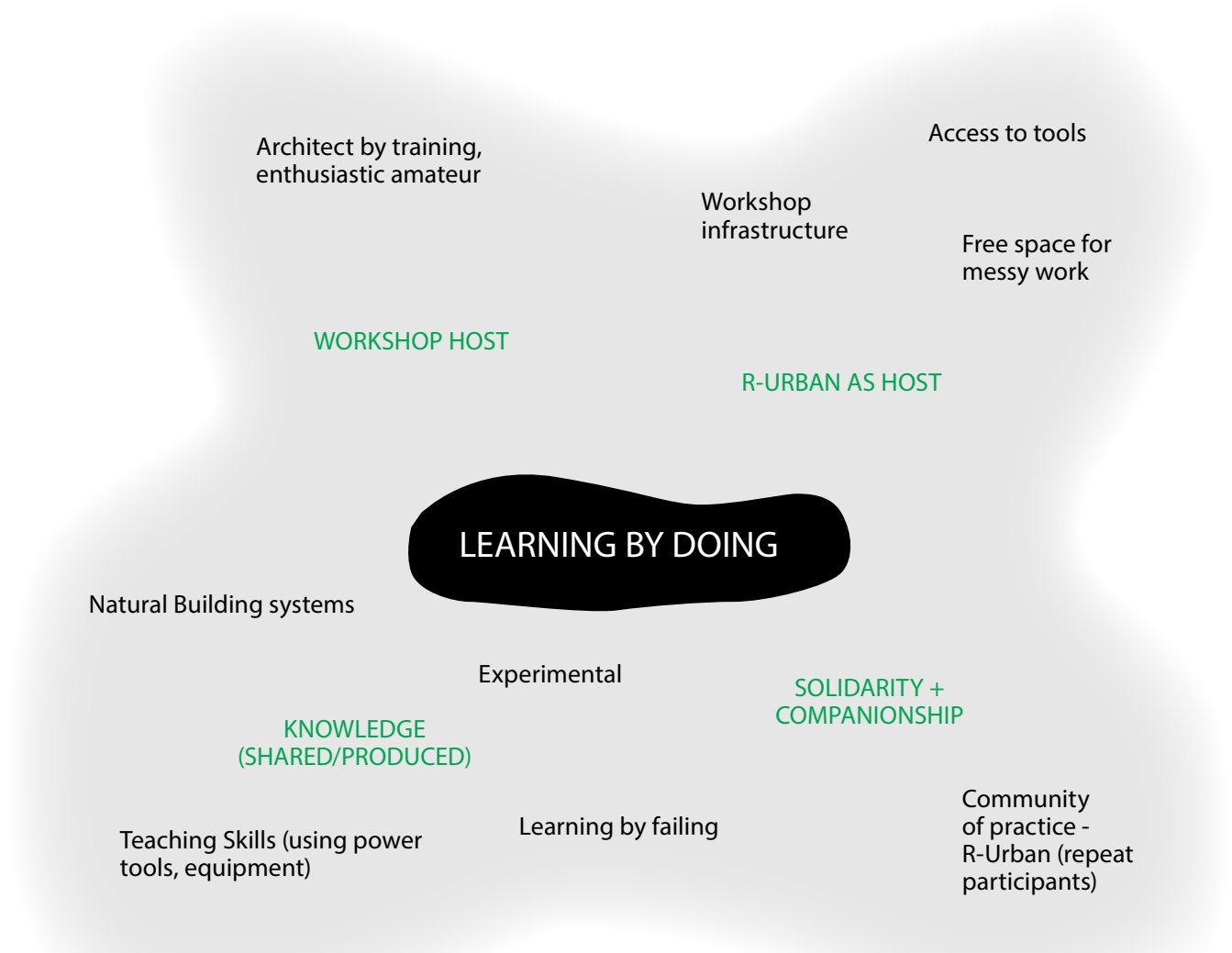
Learning + Knowledge

☉ Natural Building Systems – the workshops were an opportunity to get hands-on with new building and construction techniques. Sessions would recap the impact of existing construction methods on the planet (e.g. concrete and carbon emissions), before foregrounding two experimental natural alternatives in the form of hemp and mycelium systems.

☉ Life-skills – many participants were completely novice makers, having never used power tools such as drills or chop saws before. Most sessions involved at least one new participant, so all sessions involved how to safely and correctly use these tools which have application elsewhere. Many participants said demystifying power tools which seemed scary was an empowering process and has application elsewhere in life.

☉ Time - these sessions took place over multiple days with repeat attendees coming to more than one session over the two-week period. The natural building methods used required long cure (hempcrete) and inoculation periods (mycelium). This meant learners could dip in and out and follow the process over the two weeks before revelling the final results at the Companions Digest.

☉ Learning-by-doing – a group of enthusiastic novices learning together through experimentation. Partly due in course to my role as session facilitator and limited experience with the construction system. In this instance the aim was do – then to reflect and see what could be learnt through the process and taken forwards to future projects.



Colouring the Communal Table Cloth



Figure 58 - Workshop attendee working on a wax candle natural dye relief print.

LOCATION R-URBAN POPLAR
DATE AUGUST 31
TIME 16:00-19:00
WORKSHOP LEAD Alisa Ruzavina, Hayley Caine
PARTICIPANTS 11

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"Learn how to make natural dyes with your food waste and how to use wax to make textile prints. Contribute to the co-creation of a communal tablecloth for the Climate Companions feast on Sunday the 11th. Make your own paper and shape it into cups and plates for our shared meal. "

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

" This workshop was the usual R-Urban chaos... it involved drawing in wax while responding to the theme of nature and the neighbourhood. People's interpretation was very literal a fox the bees the birds... Not quite the discussions I had in mind when we planned the session, but the group had a nice time all the nice time all the same.

I questioned how relevant this workshop was to the main theme and agenda of the curriculum, but its popularity and the small group of natural dye makers showed a keen engagement with this eco-practice. Unlike previous workshops the aim was to co-make a communal table cloth which would be the centre piece of the final meal... it was nice to work on a collaborative artwork, despite our (my) artistic limitations."

Bangla Feast



Figure 59 - Bangla Feast learning to make Bangladeshi delicacies with local produce

LOCATION R-URBAN POPLAR

DATE AUGUST 31

TIME 16:00-19:00

WORKSHOP
LEAD Aleya

PARTICIPANTS 30

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"Come join a collective Bangla Feast, made with locally grown Poplar veg. During the meal we'll be discussing climate change in Bangladesh and how we can act in solidarity from London."

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

" Aleya arrives and unpacks a black disposable kitchen cloth ... not so sustainable I think to myself... but do not protest in order not to upset her... soon the site is a buzz with over 40 participants ... Aleya really does know how to mobilise a network.

The workshop revolves around samosa folding followed by a tour of the R-Urban garden with Aleya to learn about Bengali crops, a frequent summer sight in Tower Hamlets. We learn about Uri which is a bit like a runner bean which is used in curries or can be fried. Aleya remarks that this it has grown very well this year due to climate change and the sweltering London summer.

The next plant is Khodu a variety of Bengali squash, they come in all shapes and sizes ... Aleya grew one that was "as tall as my son" and is used mainly in curries. A neighbouring grower then talks about Duggie – something a bit like spinach but comes in red. You harvest from the top and new growth comes from below so you can constantly harvest through the season.

The workshop has a really nice mix of ages, cultures and genders. It's a nice opportunity to build connections and relations through the act of sharing a meal and learning about some of the intricacies of Bangla food. "



Figure 60 - Urri, bean plant and flowers from the garden tour



Figure 61 - Mr Naga and green chilli on the garden allotment tour with resident grower.



Figure 62 - Food growing and community meals



Figure 63 - Khodu curry, fresh samosa and pilau

Learning + Knowledge

☺ Learning in solidarity – the session was an opportunity to learn about the unique food landscape of Poplar and Tower Hamlets, which is reflective of the Bangla food growers who tend many of the neighbourhoods community gardens. The garden tour led by resident/cook/ grower Aleya was an opportunity to share situated/indigenous knowledge around growing Bengali food crops, as a way of connecting with home cultures (through food). It was also an opportunity to explore this in relation to our changing climate, reflecting on how the UKs warming temperature was actually improving crop yields (at least anecdotally)

☺ Sharing food, sharing cultures – food has always been one of the primary modes of engagement at R-Urban, offering a change to bring together diverse communities at the hub. In this case it was an opportunity to learn all about Bangla food, it's rituals (the folding of each samosa) and bring the Bangla community together and exchange with other local and intentional communities.



Noticing the Neighbourhood A Listening Workshop



Figure 64 - Testing out the Microphone Listening Devices

LOCATION R-URBAN POPLAR
DATE September 02
TIME 16:00-19:00
WORKSHOP LEAD Zoe Petersen and Dan Lynch
PARTICIPANTS 5

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"Meditative listening and sound recording are two ways of changing our perceptions of ourselves and the world around us. We'll explore these and use different microphones to record collaborative 'sound sketches' of R-Urban, the neighbourhood, and the people and creatures who live here."

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

"any idea how many people will come?" asks Zoe ...
"anywhere between one and 50" I respond, quietly hoping it's a small group.

Zoe starts the workshop with a listening warm up derived from the work of the artist Pauline Oliveros. We begin standing in a circle by the shipping containers and engage in two rounds of meditative listening, the aim of the first is to listen to everything, to try to take in every single sound that you hear. In the second, the aim is to focus on one sound for the full 3 minutes. What soon becomes clear is that the site is dominated by the A12 motorway, it creates such an overlooked part of the R-Urban site experience.

The second half of the workshop uses audio recorders as an exploration tool to tune in and listen carefully to the sounds of the neighbourhood. Working in pairs with headphone splitters makes for quite an intimate experience the two young twins probably aged 7 are most interested in their own voices. ... "hello hello hellooooo... can you hear me... hello hello hello... can you hear me". We then explore the neighbourhood aiming to record machine noises, the sounds of the elements, animal and plant noises and human body or voice. It's an engaging and thoughtful experience and lovely to explore the neighbourhood through its soundscape, observing the mundane or seeing the streets with fresh eyes. "

Wild Poplar Foraging Walk



Figure 65 - Neighbourhood Foraging Walk exploring Langdon Park
Source: Nana Maolini

LOCATION	TEVIOT AND BROWNFIELD
DATE	SEPTEMBER 03 2022
TIME	10:30-14:30
WORKSHOP LEAD	Ru Kenyon
PARTICIPANTS	33
CURATORIAL THEME	Urban Exploration

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"Explore the wild garden spaces of Poplar with a guided foraging tour and workshops at each of these magical spaces.

10-11.20 Join the Burcham Street Gardeners - for some wildlife pond dipping and a workshop which celebrates the weeds in our gardens

11:20-11:50 Greening Brownfield - Explore the wildlife habitat of this beautiful garden with a tour from gardener Geraldine.

11:50-13:00 Poplar Foraging Walk - Exploring Poplars parkscapes with foraging expert Ru Kenyon, we'll discover the world of food on our doorsteps and sample some foraged delights.

13:00-13:30 Teviot Community Garden - Visit the thriving community food garden and take part in the lunchtime garden harvest.

13:30-15:00 R-Urban Poplar - We end our walk with a communal lunch with foraged and harvested veg"

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

" We start the walk and our expert forager Ru holds up a plum like shell he asked, "Does anyone know what this is ?" ... "Is it a nectarine or a Peach?" "It's the same family is to stone fruit... it's an almond and grown here in London" Ru then continues to explain how the urban heat island effect makes the urban environment a much more tropical climate for food, particularly in Poplar compared to Tottenham where he lives ... "Jungle vibes" as Ru describes it.

What follows is a three-hour neighbourhood foraging walk, a magical experience. It's a strange combination of both walking with a purpose but with little direction, being guided by the plants and people's curiosity. It's a slow process, a slowing down to take in every detail of the environment and really does change your perception of the neighbourhood making you realise how much wild food is on your doorstep.

"

Spaces of Civic Learning

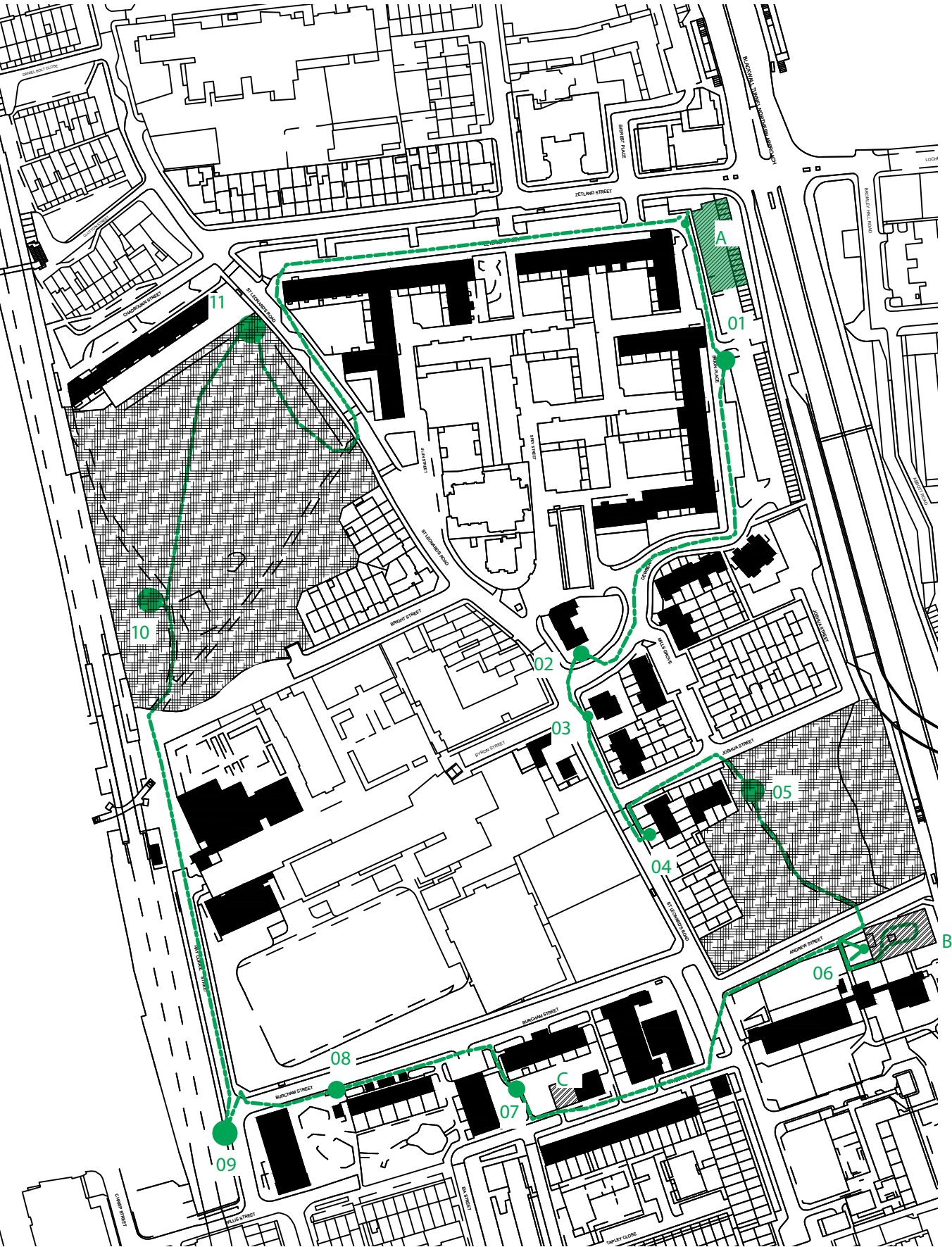


Figure 66 - Walking map of the 2 hour foraging walk

FORAGING WALK KEY

GARDENS

A - R-Urban Poplar

B - Greening Brownfield

C - Burcham Street Gardeners

WILD FOOD

01 - Common Lime Tree, Linden tea

02 - Apple Tree

03 - Wild Rocket

04 - Crab Apple Tree

05 - English Cherry

06 - Fennel

07 - Pea Locust Tree

08 - Chestnut

09 - Wild Rocket

10 - Mallow flower

11 - Hawthorn, Hawberries



Figure 67- Picking crabapples from the neighbours tree

Source: Nana Maolini



Figure 68 - Fennel seed harvesting

Source: Nana Maolini



Figure 69 - Apple tree, harvesting cultivated apples from a street tree

Source: Nana Maolini



Figure 70 - Making hawberry ketchup with harvested bounty

Spaces of Civic Learning

☺ Exploring neighbourhoods which majority of attendees were already familiar with as residents. These are spaces of the everyday, spaces which people commute, spaces of transition. By walking and exploring as a practice the space of the neighbourhood becomes the site of investigation. Providing a spatial lense to view the city in a new light. Wild food, and exploring the existing ecology of the street is the starting point.

☺ Ru remarks that every foraging walk is uinique, you can walk the same streets at different times of year and find new crops depending on the seasons. This provides a temporal experience.

☺ Powerful experience for thinking spatially, how could understanding wild food enable a different approach to street design and urban planning? What impact can this have beyond an experiential walk?

☺ Learning in the outdoors, learning through all the bodily senses.

04 - Performative pedagogies - experiencing the street



Figure 71 - Learning from the Street(trees)
Source: Nana Maolini

Learning + Knowledge

☺ Embodied learning - exploring the local streetscape through walking and sensory observation. Using bodily senses to primarily see potential food crops and 'Wild foods' that are overlooked on daily commutes.

☺ Collective knowledge sharing around identifying and recognising particular plants, with guidance from expert (Ru) who was able to give extensive information about the plant histories, benefits, challenges etc.

☺ Performative - moving through the city as a large group (20+ participants), moving very slowly, observing more deeply than usual. We travelled less than two kilometres but it took us 3

hours and could have been longer.

☺ Developing situated knowledge around urban streetscape of the neighbourhood and ecological knowledge, where can food be found and at what time of year to harvest.

☺ In parallel developing better understanding of how the streetscape is a designed space, people choosing which trees of plants and understanding some forms of 'wild food' are cultivated.



Adorning the Communal Table Cloth: Natural Inks, Wax Crayons, Eco-Embroidery



Figure 72 - Natural dye printmaking for the communal tablecloth

LOCATION R-URBAN POPLAR

DATE SEPTEMBER 07 2022

TIME 16:00-19:00

WORKSHOP
LEAD Hayley Caine

PARTICIPANTS 9

CURATORIAL
THEME Reflection, Companionship

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"Learn how to make botanical inks out of foraged plants and food waste. Make wax crayons from natural colours. Reflect on your relationship with nature through learning to embroider with natural materials, beautifying the communal artwork in shape of a tablecloth for the Climate Companions Feast on the Sunday."

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

" This session is much more meditative than last week many due to the lack of children and it's a women's only group. I question how this workshop and event critically engage with climate change? It's a lovely activity but somehow lacking this the same impact or punch from the other sessions.

The workshop activity involves candle making using natural pigments and waxes using natural essential oils to create some rather pungent candles. The group also begin making dye prints for the tablecloth using lino print blocks and paint brushes, again working towards the final companion's feast. The workshop really focuses on the health and well-being of taking part in craft activities, although I'm soon criticised by the facilitators for describing it as craft rather than art."



Figure 73 - Naturally dyed fabric sample
Source: Nana Maolini



Figure 74 - Staining the communal table cloth with natural dyes



Figure 75 - Wax drawing for relief print



Figure 76 - Making paper bowls for the final feast

Learning + Knowledge

☉ Connecting crafts to environmentalism – both this session and the first on natural dyes aimed to bring together the practices of craft and their wellbeing benefits alongside engagement with sustainable or natural processes in the case of creating natural dyes, waxes, printing methods. This intersection provides an accessible and friendly introduction to question and consider how other widely used methods in other industries are potentially harmful e.g. chemical dyes in the fashion industry.

☉ Possible (renewed) futures – at this stage the rediscovery of ancient practices around natural dyes is relatively in its infancy. Interesting to connect how this is a practice of unlearning – harmful commercial practices and relearning and adapting ecological knowledge within the

domestic world of craft.

☉ Craft and conversation – the activity of engaging in quiet craft, also creates a reflective space for group or paired conversation, this was often linked to the sustainability and low-impact living, but also gave space for companionship building.

☉ Craft and wellbeing – the session also has wellbeing benefits for participants, both by creating a social space but there is a connection between keeping the hands occupied to give your head some space. Crafts, creative practices, and arts all have this ability to slow down, take care and reflect.



Mossy Walk Mossy Talk



Figure 77 - Inspecting Moss samples gathered at R-Urban
Source: Nana Maolini

LOCATION R-URBAN POPLAR

DATE SEPTEMBER 08 2022

TIME 16:00-19:00

WORKSHOP LEAD Hester Buck

PARTICIPANTS 16

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

" Filtering the air, capturing carbon and providing micro habitats within grey urban areas. Moss tells an eco-feminist story of environmental care.

During a walk around Poplar we will explore where we can find moss and what this tells us about the ecology of the city. We will use our harvest to make a series of terrariums filled with micro forest of moss, imagining new futures for Poplar in these jam jars ecosystems. op."

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

" The workshop starts with a 20-minute introduction to Moss with deep engagement from the group. We cover; sphagnum mosses, pincushion mosses, carpet mosses, the vascular structure of moss, how moss binds pollution (PM10 and 2.5), how moss is a pioneer species, how it's a companion plant, how it impacts on the albino effect, its role in horticulture and persecution by gardeners ... it's a real deep dive into the humble world of this species.

We then begin a very short moss walk which is curtailed by the torrential rain. It takes is directly from the R-Urban site along the A12 which has created good conditions for moss to thrive due to its neglect from typical green space maintenance. The group task is to harvest different varieties to make small moss terrariums ... it's a bit like a treasure hunt with the kids very excited to get hands on and pick their pincushion mosses.

We return to the classroom and begin to make our little Moss terrariums, with what we have foraged. It raises a strange juxtaposition between harvesting for our own needs versus leaving it in its place in the city, but the act of making and caring for a small piece of moss is a rewarding process for learners."

Spaces of Civic Learning

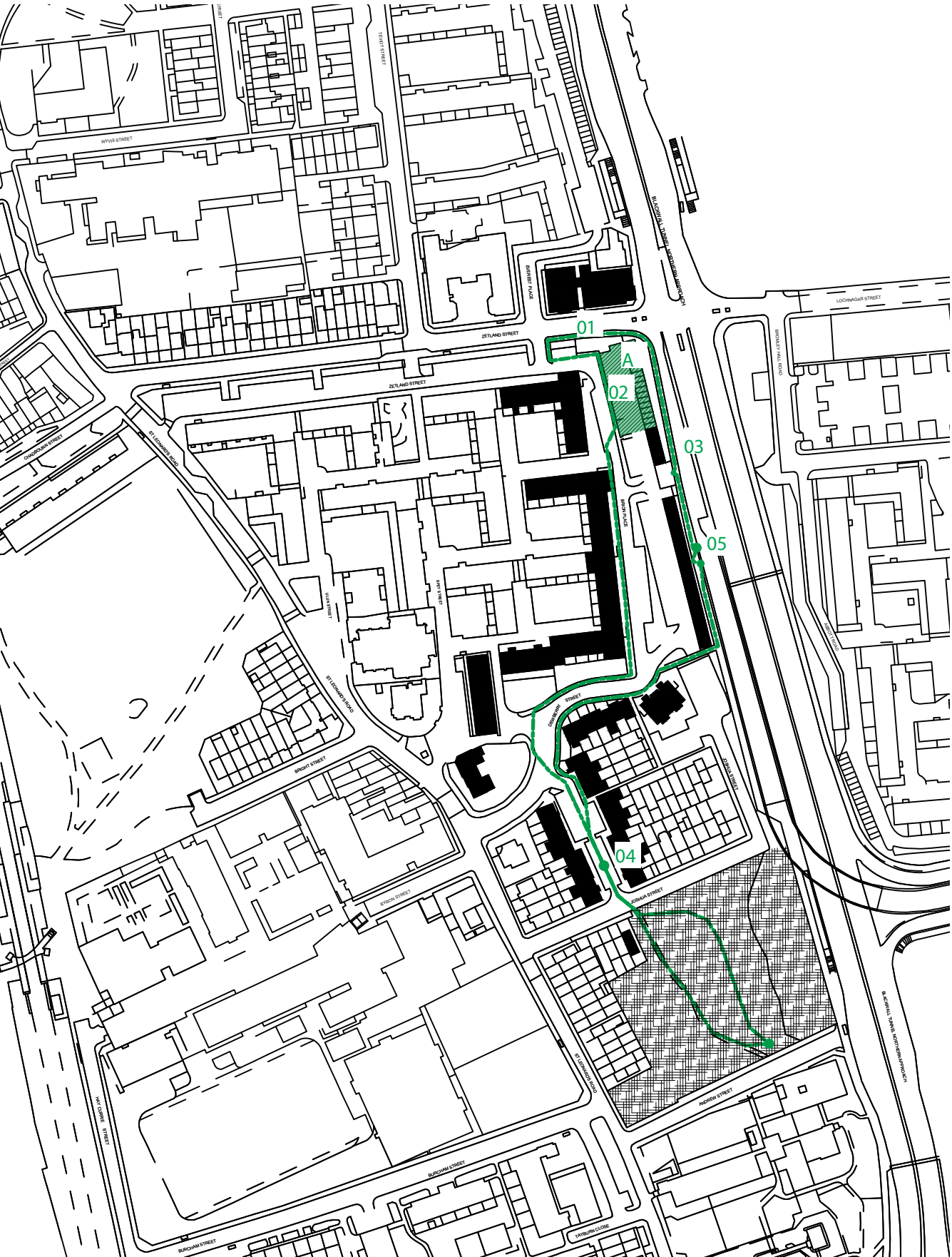


Figure 78 - The moss walking route, the walk was cut short by torrential rain

MOSS WALK KEY

GARDENS

A - R-Urban Poplar

MOSS FAMILIES

- 01 - Sphagnum
- 02 - Pincushion
- 03 - Carpet
- 04 - Swan's Neck Thyme Moss
- 05 - Springy Turf Moss



Figure 79- Leaving R-Urban towards the A12 motorway



Figure 80 - Workshop host introducing moss species



Figure 81 - In search of local mosses along A12

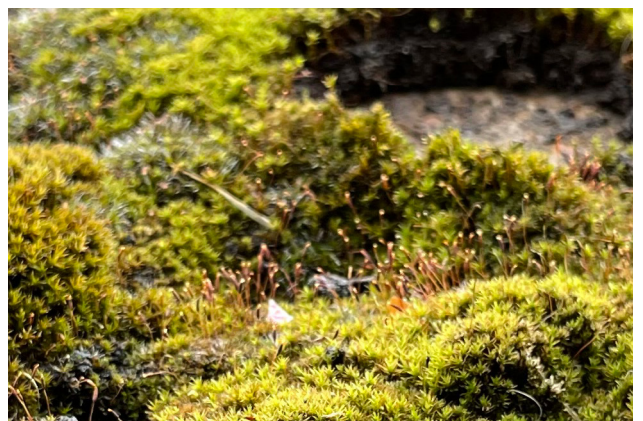


Figure 82 - Pincushion moss found on A12

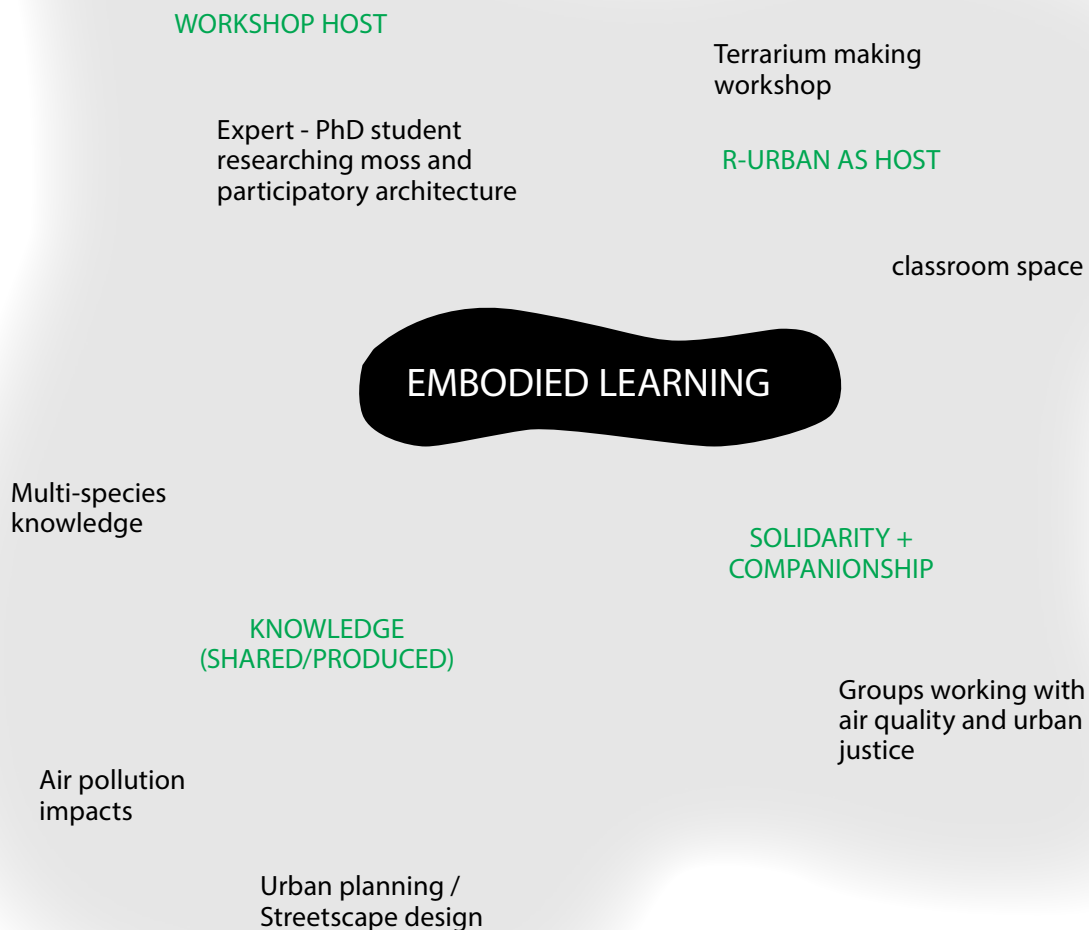
Learning + Knowledge

☉ Embodied learning - by exploring the local streetscape via a treasure hunt for moss species. This walk was quite active, and really encouraged learners to walk slowly, observe carefully and relate on how the growth of moss reflected local climatic conditions (damp spaces more conducive to moss growth). The moss hunt was also a tactile way of engaging with the topic, harvesting, touching, smelling, feeling the moss gave new appreciation for this overlooked species.

☉ Performative – much like the foraging walks this was a moment to collectively move and observe the city as a group (around 20 people),

quite the spectacle and passers-by stopped to ask what we were doing. It also felt quite playful to be hunting for as many different species of moss as you could find.

☉ Moss and urban issues – It was interesting how the facilitators knowledge around moss appealed to all ages and levels of experience (we had participants from 5-70+, and with a range of qualifications MA, Phd, No formal qualifications). Much of the knowledge was made tangible by reading and understanding the role of moss in the ecosystem, how it binds particulate matter (pollution) as it grows, and how as a species it is often overlooked in horticultural framing.



Soil Secrets



Figure 83 - Inspecting R-Urban Soil Samples under the microscope
Source: Nana Maolini

LOCATION R-URBAN POPLAR

DATE September 08

TIME 16:00-19:00

WORKSHOP LEAD Compost Mentis and LEAP Micro AD

PARTICIPANTS 9

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"This collaborative workshop offers time and space to connect with the incredible world under your feet. We'll explore what soil means to each of us, and how the health of our soils is so fundamental to the health of the local and global ecosystems we are part of. We'll be mixing practical activities, games, conversation and theory, meeting soil microbes through the microscope, learning how fungi, bacteria and the wider soil food web make compost and how we as humans can be part of this too. "

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

" The session is facilitated by our site partners and Harri from compost mentis, they hold the space really nicely, we do a round of introductions, we share our pronouns, and one word for an association with soil:

"microbe, alive, worms, soft, wormery, fingernails, growth, alive, vegetarian, uncertain, ecosystem, origin of life, alchemy..."

The workshop begins by starting to discuss what is actually in soil; a mixture of minerals, clays, water, organic matter, bacteria, microorganisms ... it's endless. The conversation then moves towards climate change and the links between soil and planetary health, discussing how agriculture and fertiliser can leach soils of its nutrients and how the current food system has a reliance on ammonium nitrates.

We then engage in a soil web game, a playful way of engaging with the soil subsystem focusing on what is eaten by what how it is all interlinked is what is an ecology of complex relations. All three facilitators have so much deep knowledge but they're also incredibly humble recognising the limits and unknown nature of soil.

The most memorable part of the workshop is investigating soil through a microscope, it's mind blowing... the soil is dancing on screen with so much hidden life obscured from every from our everyday."



Figure 84 - Soil web mapping



Figure 85 - Word association game with soil



Figure 86 - Investigating soil samples
Source: Nana Maolini



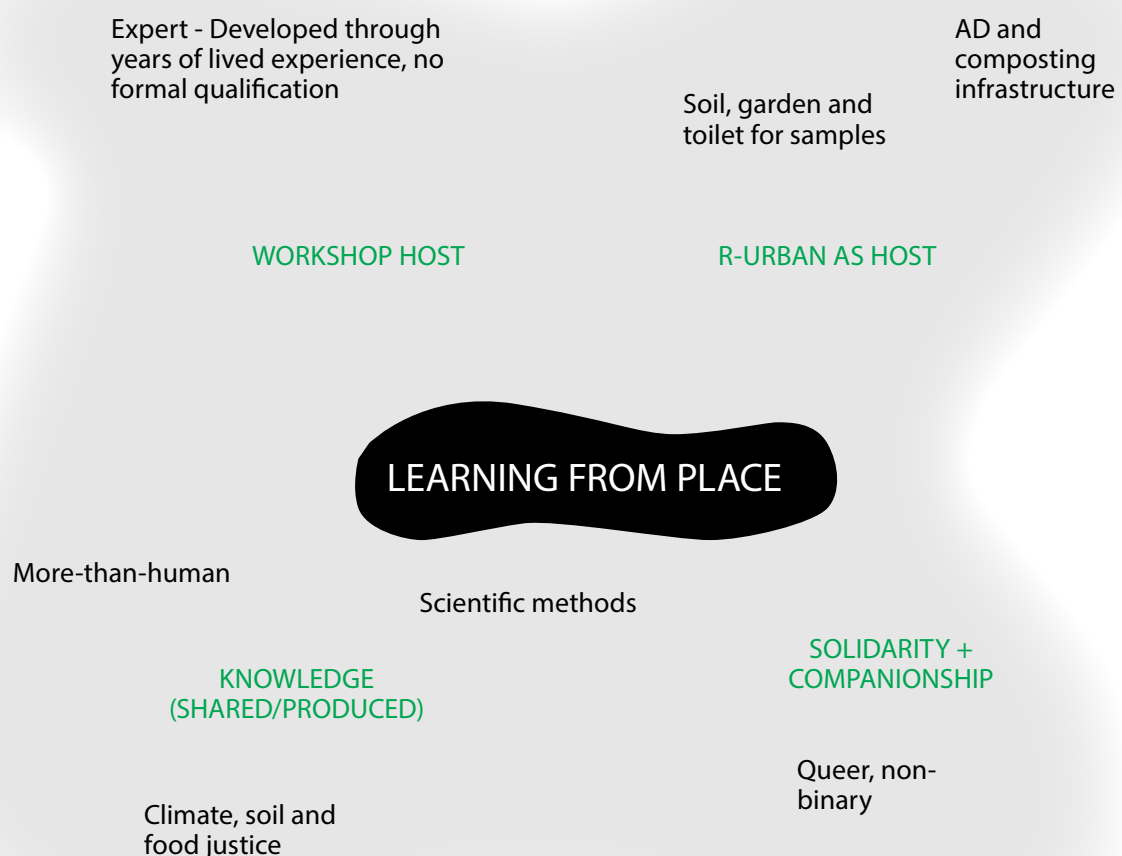
Figure 87 - Microbes, bacteria, fungi under microscope.
Source: Nana Maolini

Learning + Knowledge

☉ Learning from the more-than-human – the workshop centred on trying to engage with the more-than-human dimension of soils, recognising the complex ecologies of organisms and matter which make up soil. This was explored through two primary means of learning, firstly through play/performance – exploring the complex web of soil species connections. This was a simple visualisation of the soil matrix. The group then adopted the role of citizen scientists, taking samples from across the R-Urban site and observing them under the microscope with the help of our expert guide Harri. This had the effect of revealing hidden complexities to something taken for granted in the everyday.

☉ Situating soil and climate – the session facilitators held space for discussion and conversation about the role of soil in our ecosystems, and the importance of addressing global soil health in tackling climate change.

☉ Learning/Action across scales – session facilitator advocates for forms of micro-climate action through communities improving soil health in local community gardens and spaces, a small action in the scale of the global challenge, but one which can be empowering for those who do.



Seed Harvesting and Guerilla Gardening



Figure 88 - Seed Harvesting Expert showing growers around the garden plot
Source: Nana Maolini

LOCATION R-URBAN POPLAR

DATE September 09

TIME 16:00-19:00

WORKSHOP
LEAD Katrina Wright

PARTICIPANTS 12

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"Seeds are the start of life in all our gardens. Learn how to harvest and store seeds from this year's crops and flowers for bountiful harvests in 2023. Get hands on in making seed bombs with wild flowers for increasing bio-diversity on scrub land in Poplar."

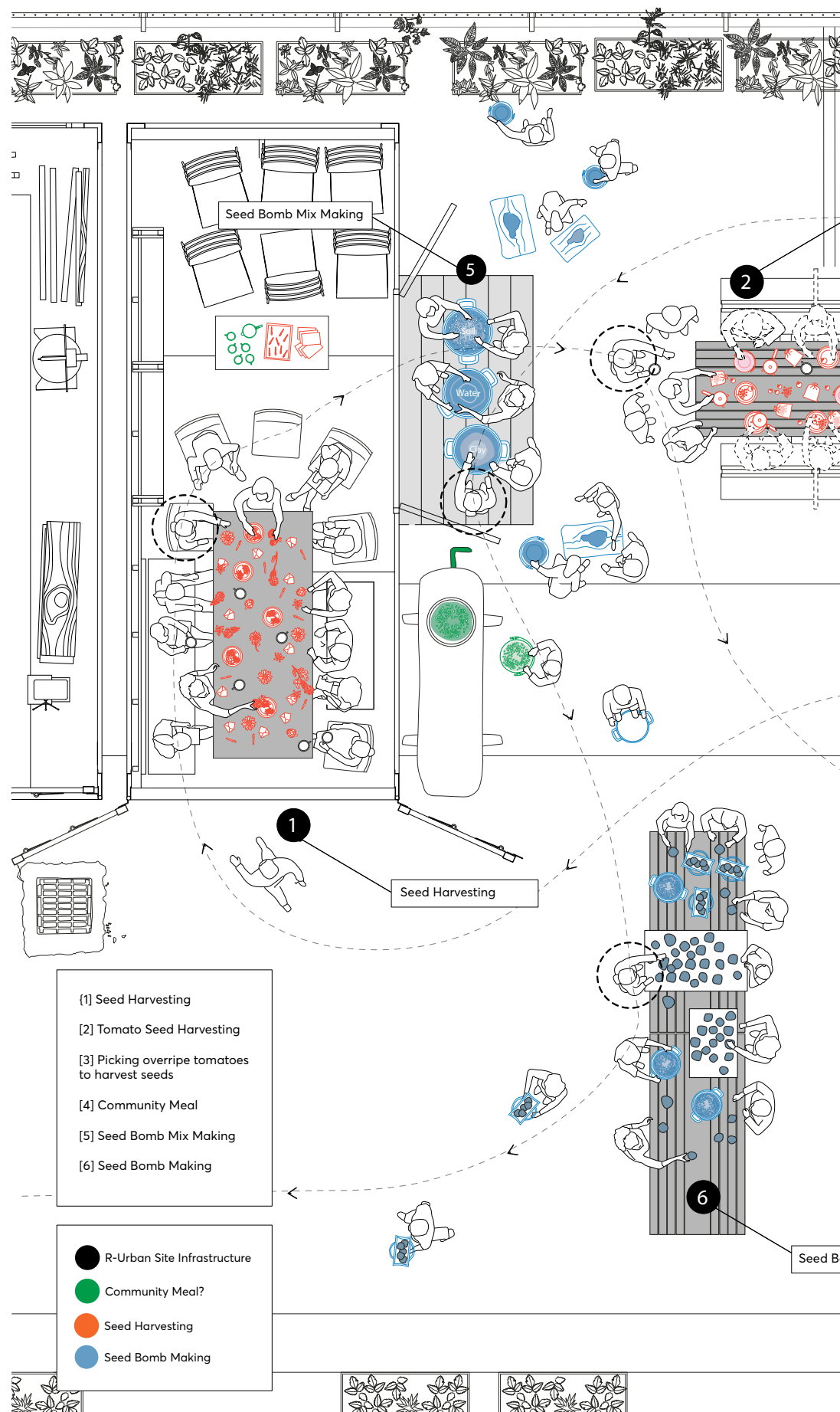
EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

" A couple of first time attendees, plus lots of familiar faces at this one. Katrina is such a warm personality and self-taught green fingered expert, it's amazing what can be learned from YouTube.

Its raining so we huddle them into the classroom container we began by harvesting and sharing dry seeds ... "in theory you should only need to buy a pack of seeds once" says Katrina. We investigate the beautiful world of seed heads; artichokes, cornflowers, sunflowers and begin rubbing seed pods together to extract mustard seeds.

Katrina shares a seed fermentation trick for tomatoes and squash which she learned from her granny. Alongside a garden/seed troubleshooting for workshop participants wanting to pick Katrina's brain. The workshop ends by making seed bombs, it's playful and childlike burying hands deep inside the bucket of soil."

Spaces of Civic Learning



- Exploring the garden – One of the few workshops which really engaged in the entirety of the R-Urban site, gathering seed heads and fruits was a lovely activity to fully engage with the space and labour of love which had gone into maintaining the spaces.
- The garden is a mixture of R-Urban managed communal beds and small micro-allotments for residents. The site also has composting, grey-water and biodiversity planting.
- The site is a former carpark and garage site, so all growing infrastructure is mobile and containerised.

Figure 89- R-Urban space analysis for the seed harvesting workshop





Figure 90 - Artichoke seed head



Figure 91 - Fermenting and harvesting tomato seeds



Figure 92 - Getting hands-on making seed bombs with wildflowers, compost and clay



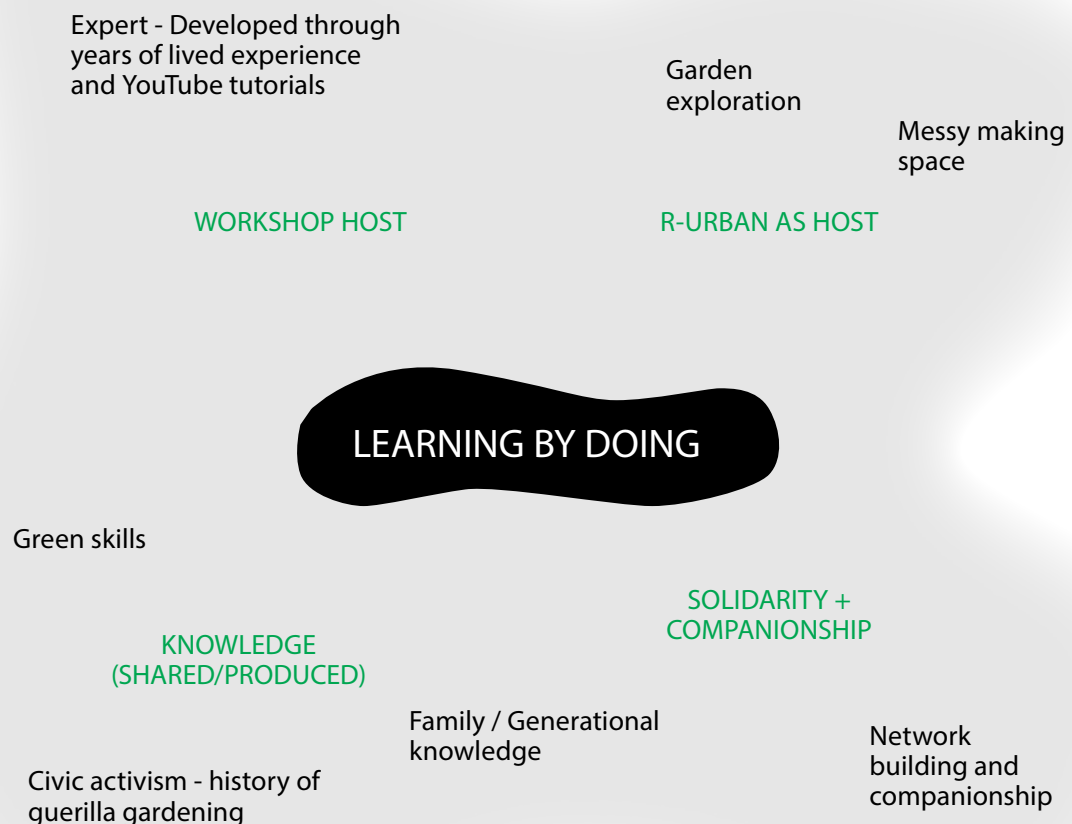
Figure 93 - Seed bombs ready for neighbourhood distribution

Learning + Knowledge

☉ YouTube expert – the workshop facilitator referred to herself as a YouTube gardener, someone who has learnt and tested many of the gardening and horticulture tips from free to access online content. YouTube is a particularly accessible form of knowledge sharing within such spaces and much can be learnt without need for formal training.

☉ Generational knowledge – beyond YouTube much of Katrina's knowledge came from her grandparents and was passed down through the family. Fermenting seeds (tomatoes, peppers and chilies) was something practiced in Jamaica and used every year by Katrina, a sharing of indigenous knowledge being brought to Poplar.

☉ Performative – ending the workshop by mixing up seed balls for guerrilla gardening was a sensory activity which involved getting dirty and connecting with the soil and seeds through touch. It was also a collective activity, which raised questions about where people wanted to 'green' and previous successes people have had in cultivating small patches of public land.



Plastic Free Poplar Companion Families



Figure 94 - Learning how to stitch repair

LOCATION R-URBAN POPLAR

DATE September 10

TIME 10:00-14:00

WORKSHOP
LEAD SunnyJar EcoHub

PARTICIPANTS 7

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"Join us for a special Plastic Free Poplar meet up at R-Urban. Together we will discuss and experiment ideas around raising kids with less plastic.

We will take our little companions to explore natural play in the garden by making our own playdough and dyes from cheap and natural ingredients. We will also show you how to craft some reusable cleaning cloths from old clothes as an eco-friendly alternative to wet wipes.

Free and open to all (big and small). Refreshments as well as a vegetarian lunch will be provided."

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

"I'm now physically exhausted and my heart isn't really in this session especially when only three people without families arrive. We plough on regardless, making natural playdough which mainly feels like an activity to occupy the hands while we talk about Plastic Free Poplar and everyone shares their plastic gripes and their tips. PFP is a project initiated by SunnyJar to encourage low-waste living in the neighbourhood, hopefully if anything the workshop helped expand their project network and get the message out there."

Companions Digest A Collective Feast



Figure 95 - Starter course for the Discursive Dinner

LOCATION	R-URBAN POPLAR
DATE	SEPTEMBER 11 2022
TIME	16:00-19:00
WORKSHOP LEAD	Carlotta Novella, Gaia Crocella
PARTICIPANTS	30
CURATORIAL THEME	Reflection, Companionship

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

" As the ending event of Climate Companions, a celebratory meal will gather us around the table, to explore the different forms of climate learning explored in the programme, but this time through an extravagant menu and table setting. Acting as a central stage for discussion on how we foreground care in our everyday actions, this collective meal offers the opportunity to celebrate the knowledge learnt and the work generated during each workshop."

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

"The end is near, one final push...The table soon fills up and as we wait for the first course, we start the rhythmic banging of the eco-leaf printing, quite a surreal experience.

Gaia and Carlotta have composed a food landscape for the feast... an edible soil full of hidden treats and Pickles. The meal is designed as a reflection of the workshops of the previous two weeks, the edible soil linking to the secrets workshops... curiosity and excitement takes over everyone dives in feeding strange mouthfuls to one and other.

The second course is a Frito Misto titled 'The crunch game of Poplar' using foraged and locally sourced veggies and greens. We then clear the tablecloth which reveals the naturally dyed collectively made table cloth with diners handed place mats which they can describe or draw their vision for the future of R-Urban in 2030. The final course is a biscotto brownie and foraged ice cream with crab apples, wild herbs, rocket and fennel seeds.

The feast was a delightful end to the programme and a lovely way to look back at what has been shared, learnt, taught and experienced."

Spaces of Civic Learning

- Alisa and Hayley's Table Cloth
- Alisa and Hayley's Table Material
- Candles, Plates and Crayons
- Moss Terrarium Workshop Work
- Charlotta and Guia's Community meal
- R-Urban Reflection Drawings
- R-Urban Table Material
- R-Urban Site Furniture

☉ The heart of the R-Urban Poplar site, the dinning area/workshop hosting space. The most frequently used space on site

☉ A long linear dinning setting (banquet style), very tightly squeezed in with around 30 people in attendance.

☉ Exhibition of the R-Urban natural dyed flags and samples from the actions earlier in the week. Candles made during the natural dyes workshops adorn the table along with a large table cloth which was produced the week prior. A series of 'softer' touches to make the dinning setting less stark and more domestic?

☉ Head of the table with the R-Urban kitchen behind, slightly raised platform and space from which to speak from and introduce the discussion points for each course

☉ Cameron takes on a roving microphone role, interviewing participants about their experience of the two-week curriculum

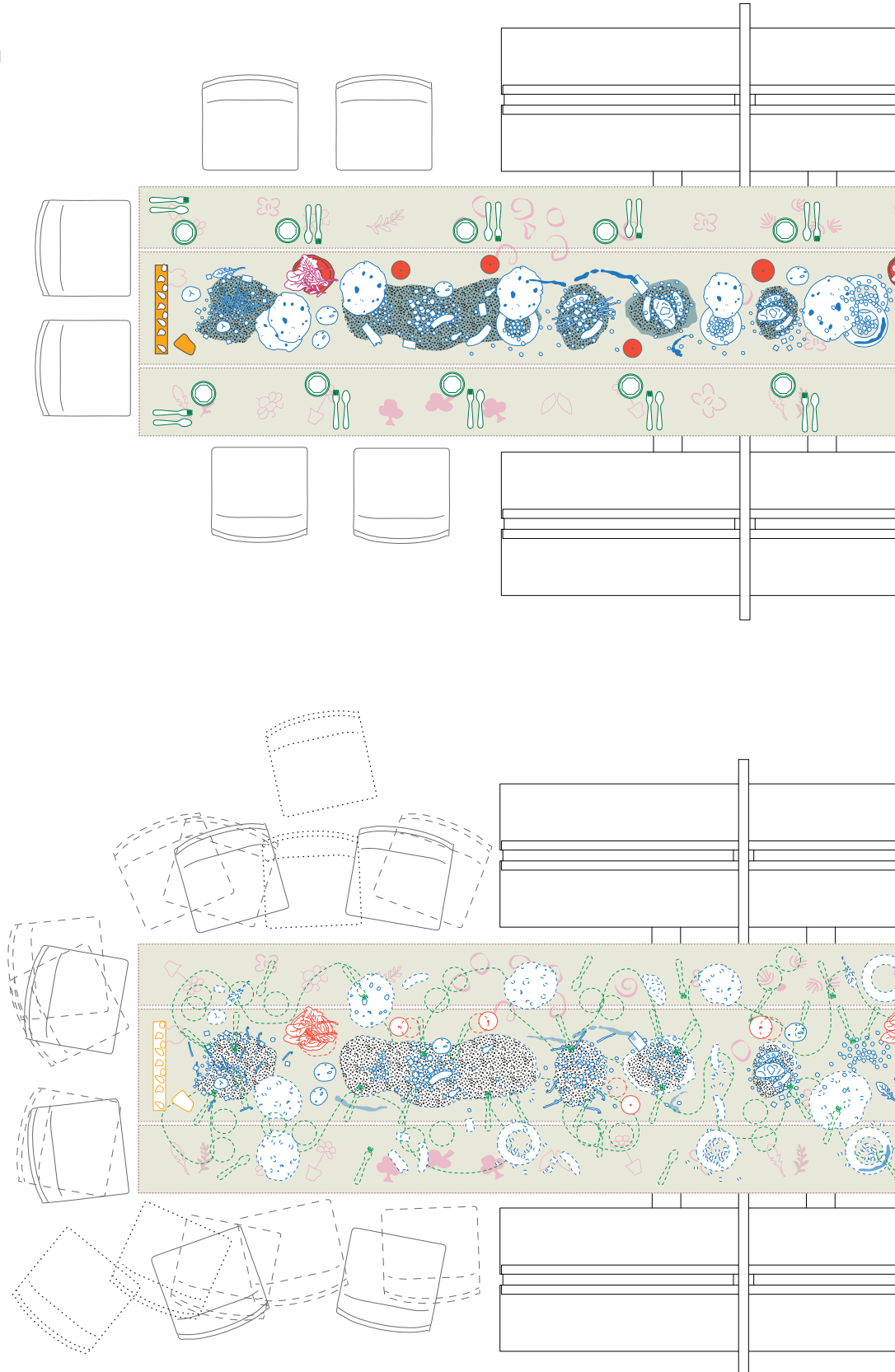
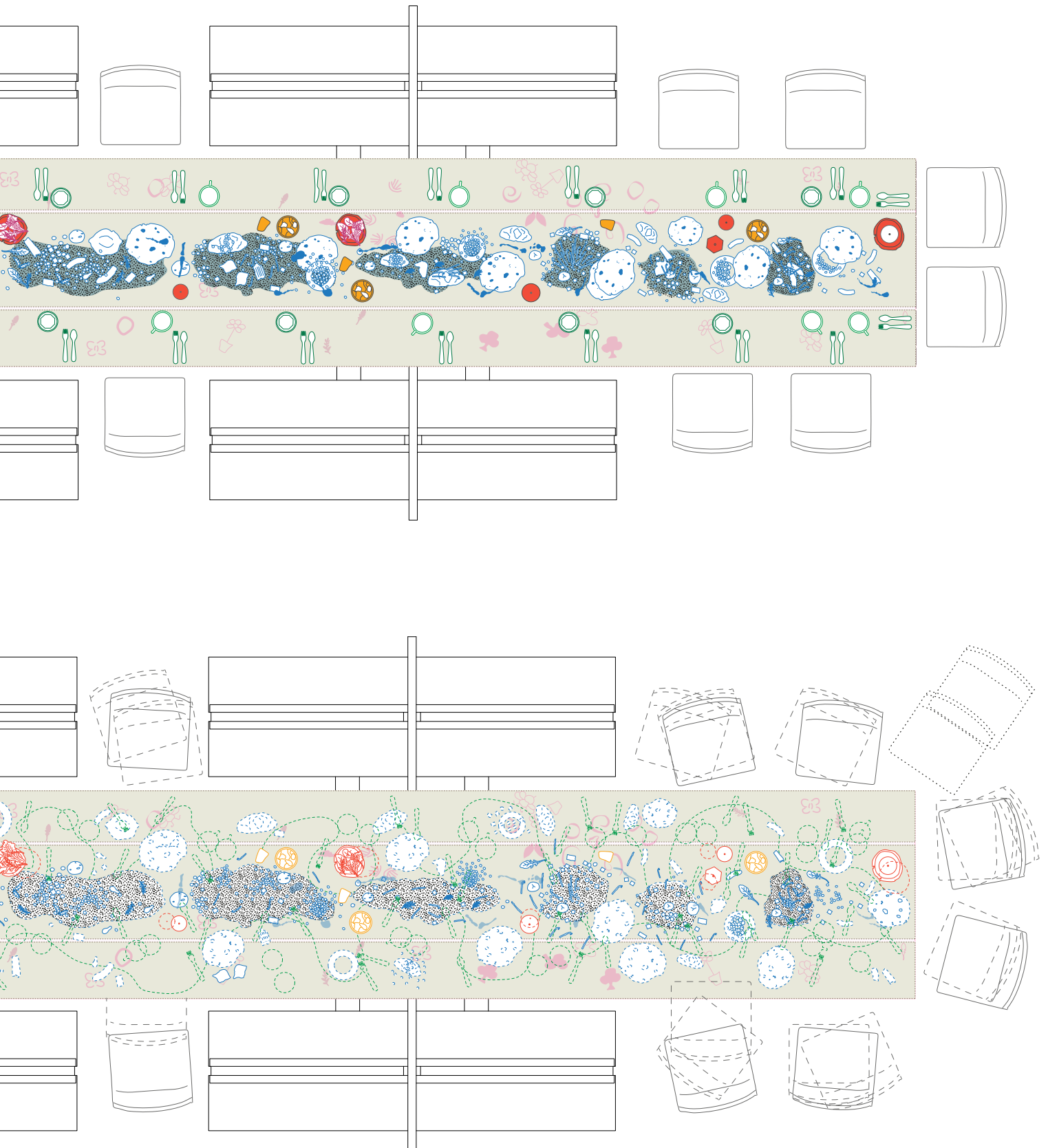
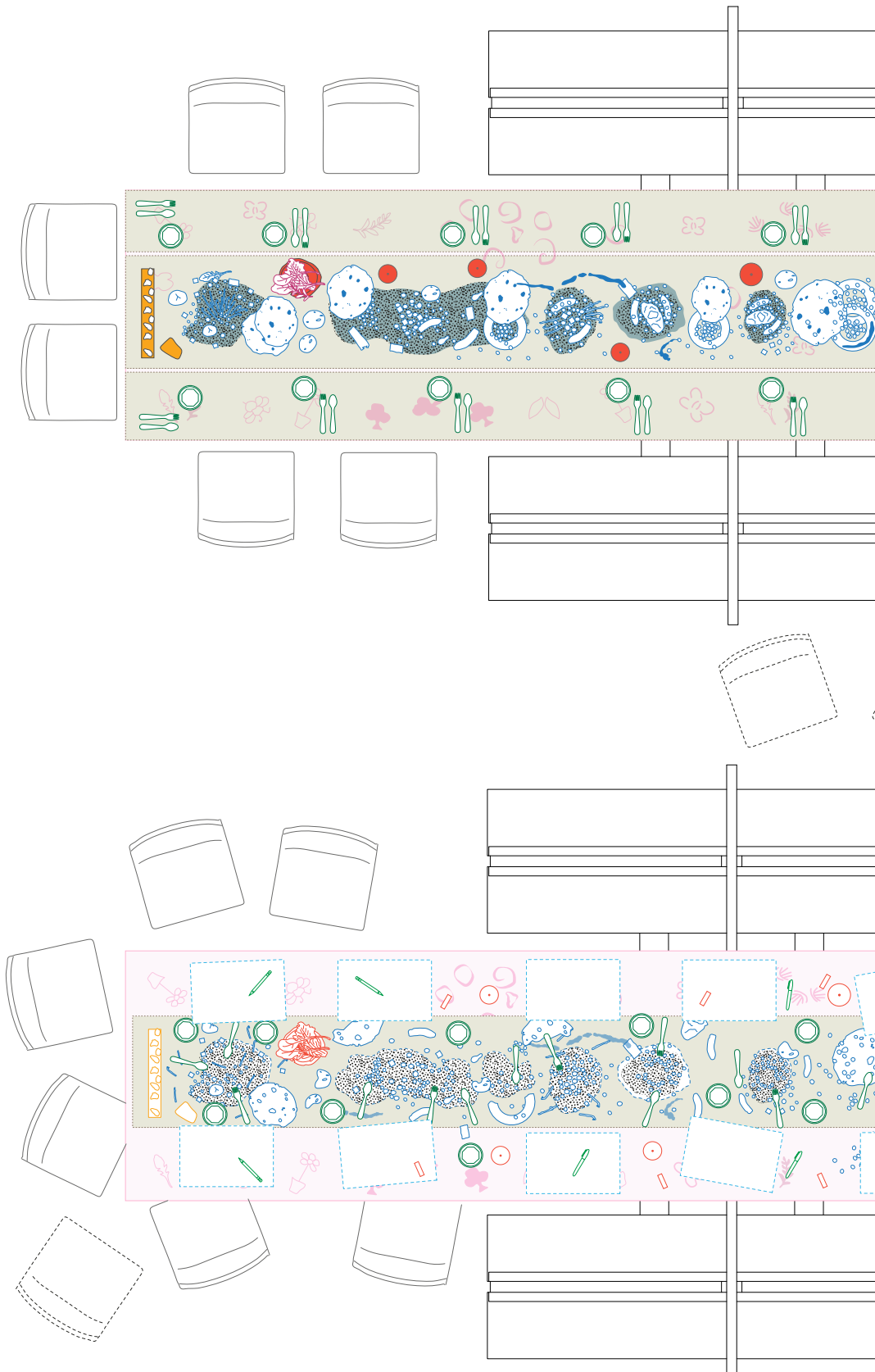


Figure 96 - R-Urban space analysis, evolution of the dining setting



Spaces of Civic Learning

- Alisa and Hayley's Table Cloth
- Alisa and Hayley's Table Material
- Candles, Plates and Crayons
- Moss Terrarium Workshop Work
- Charlotta and Guia's Community mea
- R-Urban Reflection Drawings
- R-Urban Table Material
- R-Urban Site Furniture



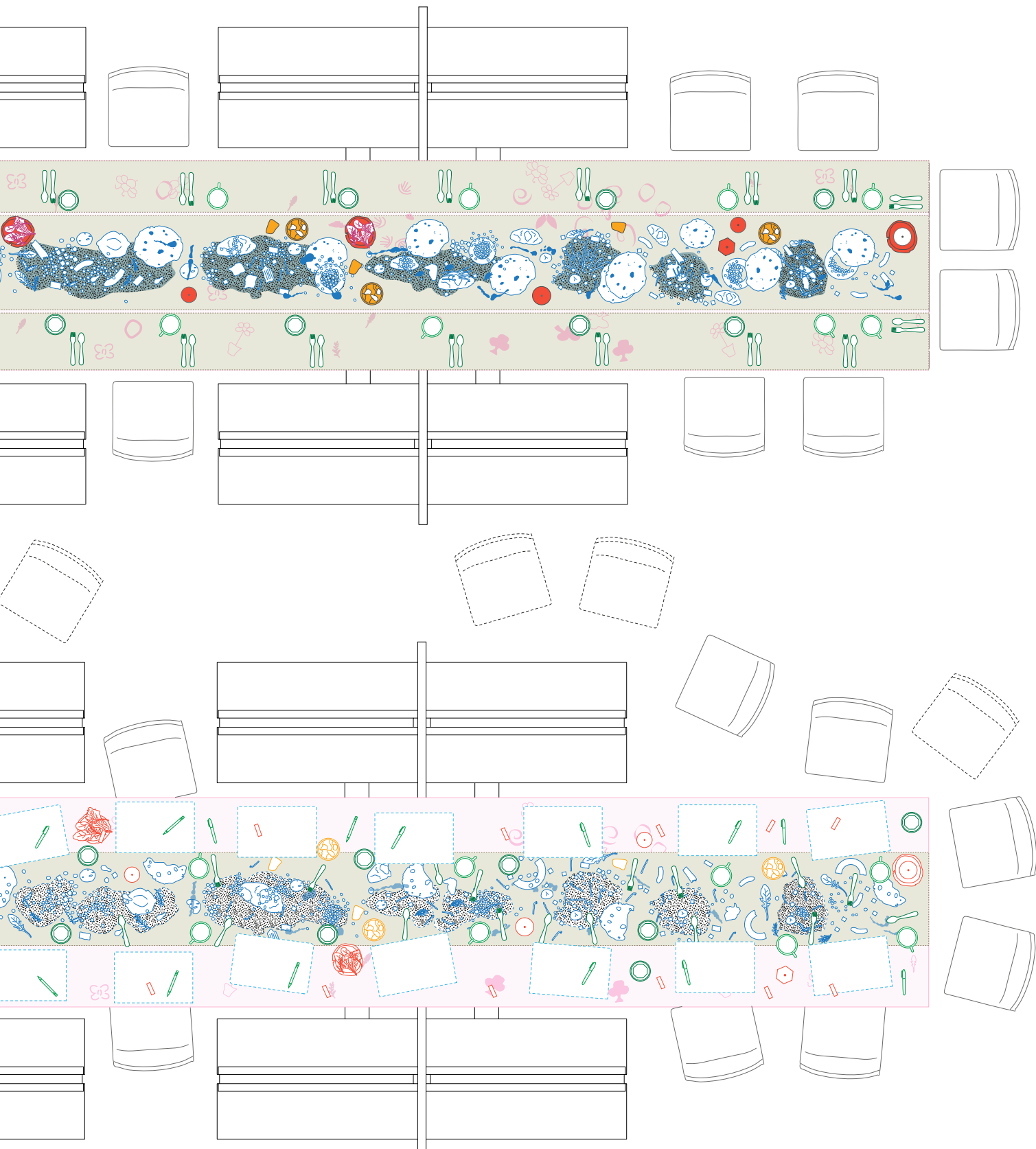




Figure 97 Exploring evolution of R-Urban by year



Figure 98 - Making connections and companionships



Figure 99 - An edible landscape, the companions digest

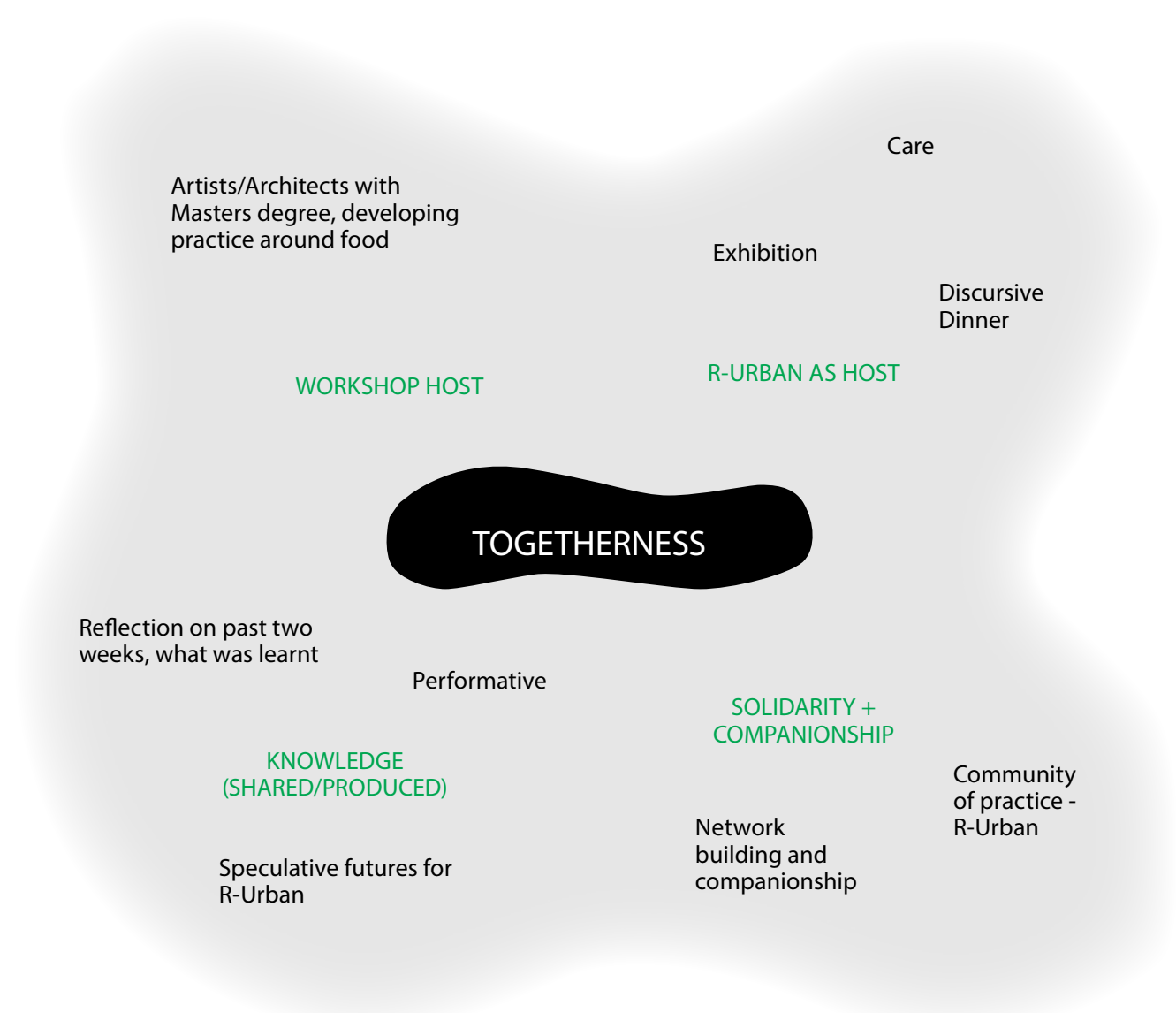


Figure 100 - Mapping possible futures for R-Urban

Learning + Knowledge

- ☉ Discursive Dinner - Food as a method of structuring the reflections, each course thematically linked to a point of reflection from the past two weeks. A format which evolved from Raumlabor and when Marcus Bader was invited to R-Urban many years ago.
- ☉ Intimate discussions, long banquet table but conversations were between 2-6 people at most. A series of reflective conversations happening in parallel.
- ☉ Creating a celebratory atmosphere, important for context. It was a celebration of the past two weeks and an opportunity to think about the future for R-Urban and the public programmes which are run from site.

- ☉ Facilitators are the chefs (both architects, one from public works) who are developing a new performative art practice around food and hosting.
- ☉ Performative learning - first course was a landscape of food (literally), which participants were encouraged to dig beneath the soil to discover culinary delights, and unearth reflections from the foraging walk, the meals ...
- ☉ Dining/Banquets as an important relational practice which builds support and care networks around a project.



**15 workshops
over 9 days**

Climate Companions 2022 in numbers

**12 participants
attended 5+
workshops**

181 participations
91 different attendees
Ages 5 - 70+

**8 collaborating
partners
(artists, experts,
community
associations etc)**

Climate Companions 2022 Film

Shot and Edited by Nana Maolini

Produced by Andy Belfield

Figure 101 - Climate Companions 2022 Film Screen
Source: Vimeo, Nana Maolini



Please scan
the QR code
or
Click the image
below to view



enshot

[more](#)   [Pricing](#) [Log in](#) [Join](#) 



A video thumbnail showing a man waving from a wooden structure in a lush, green urban garden. The structure has a sign that reads "KITCHEN PRODUCTION OF TOGETHERNESS". The text "R-URBAN" and "POPLAR" with a circular logo is overlaid on the image.

iii.

CoDesigning Learning

CC23 Programme Co-Design

Reflecting on CC22

Despite some successes from the first trial pedagogy, it was limited in its programme design. The first trial mobilised the existing R-Urban network, inviting collaborators to respond to the project theme around Climate activism and the neighbourhood. Whilst the sessions were rich, engaging and well appreciated by participants the project desired to make the process more participatory, by co-designing with the community rather than for them. This required an opening up of the programme design process and inviting a wider network of participants to shape the learning needs and desires more directly.

Post-Evaluation surveys and interviews with participants allowed for feedback on learning methods, programme highlights, and new learning needs to emerge. It also gave space to reflect on the limited impact of the first pedagogy on developing action and learner agency through the process. In order to evolve and develop the pedagogic programme a co-design group of participants and wider collaborators was formed.



Figure 102 - Companions Digest, drawing the first programme to a conclusion.

Forming a Community of Practice

The first stage of the co-design process was to form a community of practice, a group formed with a mutual desire for collective learning at R-Urban. An invitation was emailed to regular participants of R-Urban sessions over the previous year, inviting them to take part in two co-design workshops to help shape the learning needs, desires and pedagogic aim and agenda for 2023.

In total we invited 13 participants by email, with 8 opting to participate in the workshops. We also placed an open call to the wider mailing list inviting new attendees to join, with one further participant identified through this process. A group of 9 participants was formed, all women ranging in age from 25-60 and from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds.

" Dear xxx

Over the past 12 months you've been a huge part of the R-Urban project, attending multiple workshops, being engaged in our programme and simply being an all round legend!

This year we're going to be running another Climate Companions festival (like the one in September last year). We thought it would be a brilliant opportunity to involve more of our regular members in the planning of the 2023 version which is taking place in June.

We're going to host two special dinners and co-design workshops in May for our regular attendees. The purpose of the sessions is to help us to steer the 2023 festival towards your learning needs, interests and desires. The meals are an opportunity for you to share ideas of what you'd like to learn and how, suggest people and ideas for workshops or even propose sessions you'd like to host yourself.

What will your participation involve?

Both the co-design sessions will be structured around a delicious themed meal. We'll eat and discuss our way through the planning of the June Climate Companions festival. These sessions will be an opportunity to build companionships in smaller groups and help guide the R-Urban team towards a festival programme which reflects our collective interests.

We would love for you to join this group, please can you RSVP with your availability for both sessions, if you can only make one, don't worry that is still great! (* We can also cover travel expenses if difficult to reach us). If you've got any questions either email me or give me a call on 07595625285.

Best

Andy

xx - Email invitation to the co-design dinner

Co-Design Workshop 01

Discursive Dinner Workshop Plan

WHEN: Tuesday 02 May - 17:00-19:30

WHERE: R-Urban Poplar

The co-design workshops took the format of Discursive Dinners (DD), a methodology I first encountered through the critical spatial practice – Raumlabor. DD create a performative dining setting in which the workshop agenda, conversation and actions are structured through shared eating. Food becomes of way of linking discussions to themes and allows for intimate and group conversations.

Given the R-Urban hubs close connection to food through the companions and green skills programme, this method felt relevant in the context and creates a relaxed setting which helps to foster relations between participants.

The Menu
<i>Refreshments</i>
R-Urban Lemonade and fresh mint tea Gathering
Starter
Aleya's Samosa and Parotta Introductions, CC22 Film, CC23 Aim and purpose
Main
R-Urban Minestrone Learning needs and desires
Pre-Dessert
Post-Dinner Post-it notes Specific learning needs
Dessert
Raspberry Tart Post-its digestion



Figure 103 - CC22 Film screening setup for the Co-Design workshop

Starter

An opportunity for everyone to introduce themselves, share their motivations for participation. The course started with everyone eating freshly cooked samosa whilst watching the Climate Companions 2022 film made by Nana Maolini. The film was an opportunity to reflect on last years programme, and starts with some footage of a samosa making workshop with Aleya.

Following the film I gave a short presentation, which outlined the project aim, timeline, budget and some project constraints.

Main

We then moved from the site office into the garden and sat down around the communal dining table. Everyone was given a place setting which participants were invited to respond to the question: What are your learning needs and desires? Thinking about how Climate Companions support you. As we ate participants discussed the question with the neighbours and got to know one another more closely, I then asked participants to note down on their placemats their responses to the question.

Pre-Dessert

This was the most structured part of the workshop inviting participants to respond to the following questions, using post-its to assemble responses and identify specific learning needs of individuals.

- ☉ What skills do you want to learn? e.g. using specific tools, learning to build/repair something
- ☉ What knowledge you want to acquire? e.g. I'd like to learn more about nature and water habitats?
- ☉ What action you'd like to take? E.g. I'd like to do some Guerrilla gardening in the neighbourhood, I'd like to plant up that empty lot.
- ☉ How would you want to engage in the local neighbourhood? E.g. I'd like to learn more about local history
- ☉ Who would you like to host a session? E.g. could be someone you've worked with before or just seen on a YouTube clip
- ☉ Who would you like to invite to take part? E.g. who has never been to R-Urban who you think would enjoy it?
- ☉ What would you like to share yourself with the group?

Dessert

The final course was an opportunity to reflect on the post-its and outline next steps and stages. Given the time constraints the plan was to take this information and collate it into session ideas and an outline programme. Before we meet again in two-weeks to discuss, reharvest ideas and think about future roles.

Co-Design Workshop 01

Learning Needs and Desires

During the main course participants were invited to reflect on individual learning needs and desires for the new programme. Noting down on a simple place setting, specific ideas for what they wished to learn.

Many participants had prepared in advance and brought notes and ideas which were transferred onto place settings. Most needs and desires focussed on developing skills and specific sustainable-ecological knowledge. In cases participants suggested collaborators or potential hosts we could invite.

This exercise gave participants individual space to reflect on personal needs before coming together for a collective discussion.

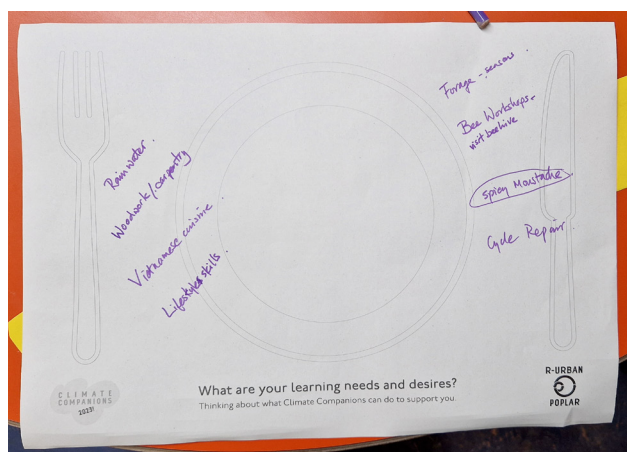


Figure 104 - Place setting worksheets used to note ideas over dinner

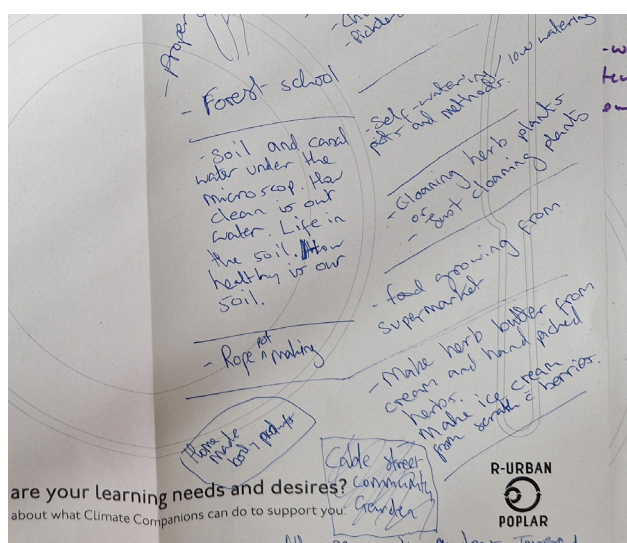
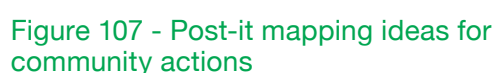


Figure 105 - Participant learning desire mapping for the future programme

Dessert was an opportunity to reflect on what was there and for participants to add anything which they felt was missing. We then outlined the next steps which would involve the second workshop in two weeks time.



Co-Design Workshop 01

Outcome

Pedagogic themes

Following the harvesting of workshop ideas, the programme team at R-Urban then made steps towards organising learning needs, desires and suggestions into a loose frame for learning programme. The first stage was to group similar workshop/learning needs into thematically linked groups. This was we could start to outline a pedagogic agenda in relation to the overall Climate Companions aim.

5 Main themes emerged from the first co-design session.

Theme 01 - Habitats (nature, ecology and the neighbourhood)

Workshop Suggestions:

- Beekeeping
- Bug Hunts
- Bird ID
- Canoeing
- Bat Walk

Theme 2 - Low-impact living (sustainability tips, hacks and zero-waste ideas for the home)

Workshop Suggestions:

- Cosmetics
- Clothes mending and natural dyes
- Zero-waste cleaning
- Sustainable Fashion
- Drip Irrigation and water in the home

Theme 3 - Preservation (of food and food cultures)

Workshop Suggestions:

- Fermentation
- Cheese and Butter making
- Bengali Pickles

Theme 4 - Wild foods, Herbs and Wellbeing (foraging, remedies and health)

Workshop Suggestions:

- Foraging Walks
- Herbal Remedies
- Herb Propagation
- Mushrooms and health

Theme 5 - Discussions, talks, screenings and visits

Workshop Suggestions:

- Climate Justice in Poplar
- Seed Sovereignty
- Gardens field trips
- Resilience in extreme weather



Figure 108 - An edible landscape for Discursive Dinner in CC22

Co-Design Workshop 02

Refining and Harvesting

WHEN: Tuesday 16 May - 17:00-19:30

WHERE: R-Urban Poplar

The second co-design workshop took place two weeks after the first, only one participant from the first workshop cannot attend and we have a group of 8. The session was again structured around a meal, this time a simpler affair with a discussion over a main dish, and with participants bringing desserts to share with one and other for the mapping exercises.

The session begins with a recap of the harvested workshop ideas and learning desires, followed by a presentation of what we've done with the information gathered. This starts by introducing the curatorial themes which link clusters of workshops. Participants were then invited to add post-it notes or suggest ideas for further workshops to the boards. The group were positive about the themes suggested, although there was less interest in hosting talks and screenings within the group.

We identified potential hosts for workshops within the groups existing contacts, and identified potential external collaborations to contact.

Following the recap we outlined the programme dates and the group decided that R-Urban would be responsible for the administration and inviting all the collaborators as project responsible.

Additional workshops suggestions:

- ☺ Feast of food cultures
- ☺ Dried fish (Shutki)
- ☺ Butter, Ghee and Whey (in addition to cheese making)
- ☺ Making oat and almond milks
- ☺ Make a planter from recycled materials
- ☺ Sunflower growing for kids
- ☺ Using natural waste-food/plants as fertiliser
- ☺ Elderflower cordial
- ☺ Herb oils
- ☺ Off-grid survival
- ☺ Composting at Home
- ☺ Sourdough
- ☺ Kombucha
- ☺ Jam making
- ☺ Vegan cheese and veganism discussion



Figure 109 - Co-Design Workshop preparation, presenting back to the group the proposed themes

Co-Design Workshop 02

Co-Mapping Networks

During the main course (Shakshuka), participants were invited to respond the question on their placemats:

Who are the community groups, businesses and organisations we should connect with?

Although this prompted some discussion within the group about connecting with other local groups in the neighbourhood, much of the dinner was spent catching up, forming relationships and thinking about how to document all the 'recipes' within the project.

Following Dinner we then began a participatory mapping exercise. Presenting the groups with an A0 neighbourhood map we then invited everyone to respond to mapping two categories:

1. Places or points of interest (e.g. places we could visit on neighbourhood walks, it could be interesting habitats or just cool/interesting places with history)

2. Community groups or local organisations that we should work with, collaborate with, invite along

This was an animated discussion and process, with participants sharing points of significance within one and other. This enabled discussion about why a point was of interest e.g. somewhere they walk past on the school run and were curious about. Equally it was an opportunity for participants to situate the R-Urban project within the neighbourhood groups and associations that participants were members of elsewhere.

Mapping Outcome:

1. Places or points of interest mapped:

- ☺ Canning Town Growing Spaces
- ☺ Cody Dick
- ☺ Reed Beds and River Lea Mudflats
- ☺ Abbey Gardens
- ☺ Jolly's Green
- ☺ Celtic Green
- ☺ Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park
- ☺ River Thames
- ☺ Limehouse Cut

2. Community groups or local organisations mapped:

- ☺ Get Out Charity
- ☺ Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park
- ☺ Poplar Union
- ☺ The Felix Project
- ☺ Bromley By Bow Centre
- ☺ Chisp Street Community Cycles
- ☺ Mile End Ecology Pavilion
- ☺ Wen
- ☺ OtiJo
- ☺ Leaders in Community
- ☺ Cody Dock
- ☺ Greening Brownfield
- ☺ Spotlight
- ☺ Bushwood Beehives



Figure 110 - Co-Mapping resources and interests within the neighbourhood

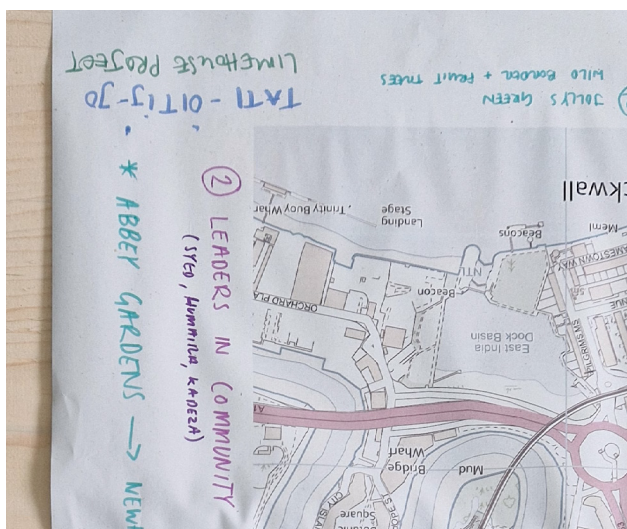


Figure 111 - Identifying potential allies and collaborators for CC23 programme

Co-Design Workshop 02

Next steps

The second workshop was concluded with Dessert (brought by participants) and discussions about next steps. It was agreed that R-Urban was responsible for invitations of identified hosts and the scheduling of the programme. The Co-Design group would participate in as many sessions as possible and also have an active role as space hosts, helping to record attendance, take photos and support workshop facilitators.

"Climate companions festival of learning is back! Join us for the second instalment taking place at R-Urban Poplar in June and early July.

Climate Companions will again explore our local neighbourhood, finding ways we can critically and creatively engage with climate change, and build new companions for care and action. This year the festival builds on the September edition, with new workshops, walks, meals and discussions which has been co-designed with participants and residents.

This month-long learning festival aims to bring together a group of 'companions' who are passionate about Poplar and the environment to develop new skills, tools and knowledge, to move towards a more caring future for the neighbourhood and planet. We're interested in how care is a form of action and an ethical approach to tackling climate change in cities. We see acts of care emerging in the neighbourhood; whether it's caring with/for others, caring for green spaces or caring with others species. This year we've identified a number of themes which the workshops and programme are designed around."

Page 2 - Climate Companions 2023 Programme

CLIMATE COMPANIONS

JUNE 10 -
JULY 7

SCAN OR
CLICK ME



TO SIGNUP



SUMMER FESTIVAL OF LEARNING
WORKSHOPS - MEALS - WALKS - TALKS
R-URBAN POPLAR E14OSP

Figure 112 - Promotional Programme flyer for CC23

CC 2023 Programme

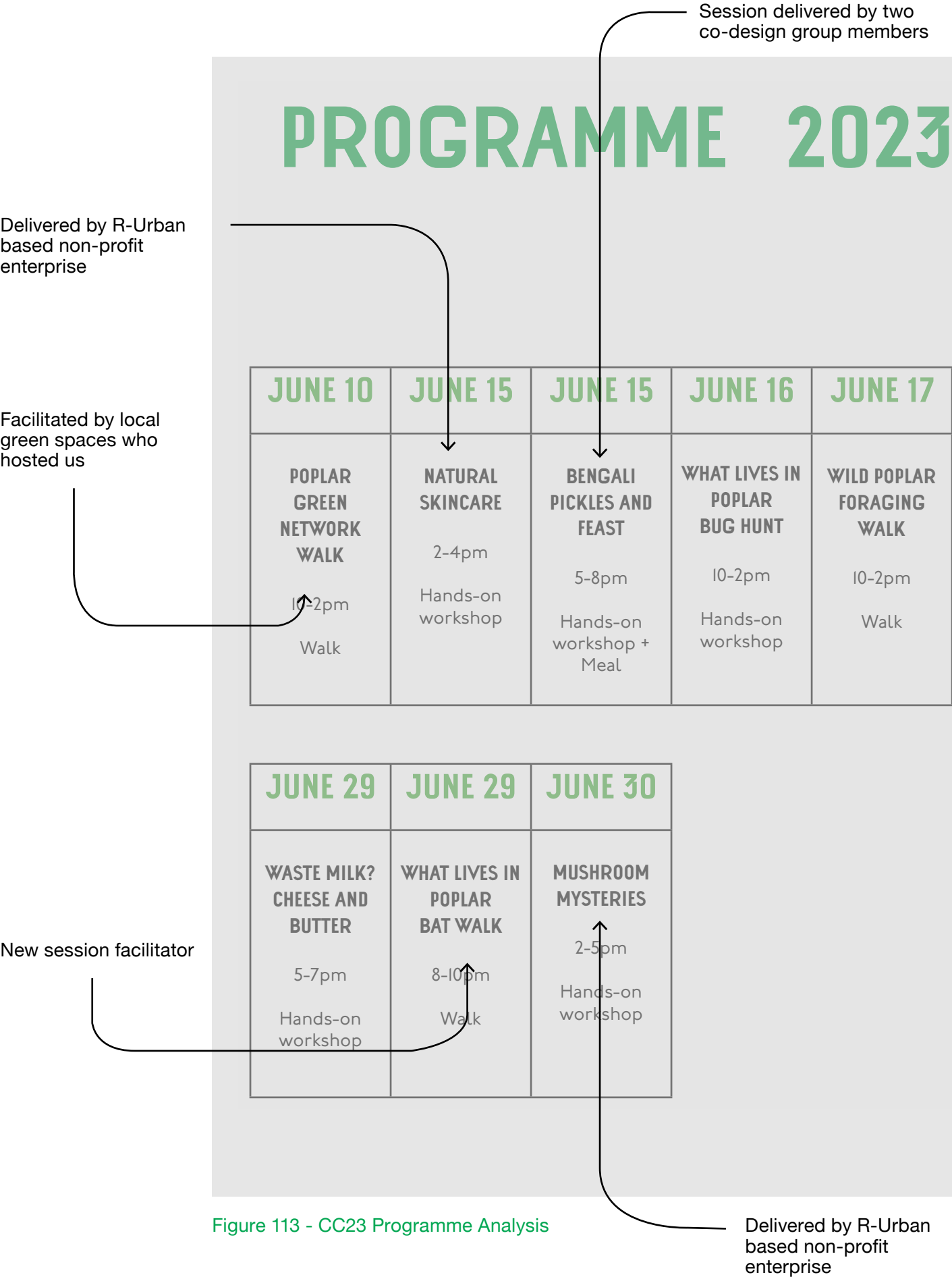


Figure 113 - CC23 Programme Analysis

All workshops are for free and take place at R-Urban Poplar, unless otherwise stated in the programme

Under 16s must be supervised by parents/guardians

If you want to book your place onto a workshop please scan/ click on this QR code.

SCAN ME



TO SIGNUP

Session delivered by co-design group members

Session facilitated by local fashion hub and enterprise

Collaborative session delivered by all

Session delivered by co-design group members

JUNE 22	JUNE 22	JUNE 23	JUNE 24	JUNE 24
NATURAL CLEANING 2-4pm Hands-on workshop	FERMENTED FOODS 5-7pm Hands-on workshop	WHAT LIVES IN POPLAR BEE HABITATS 3-6pm Hands-on workshop	HERB BOX MAKING 11-2pm Hands-on workshop	LIMEHOUSE CUT CANOE 4-7pm Canoe

JULY 01	JULY 06	JULY 06
HERBS AND HEALTH 10-2pm Hands-on workshop	NATURAL DYES CLOTHING REPAIRS 2-4pm Hands-on workshop	POT LUCK FEAST 5-8pm Meal

iv.
Climate
Companions
2023

Poplar Green Network Walk



Figure 114 - Ending the green spaces walk at Langdon Park and the guerilla raised beds built by R-Urban Poplar members and Spotlight

LOCATION TEVIOT + BROWNFIELD

DATE JUNE 10

TIME 10:30-14:00

WORKSHOP
LEAD Andy Belfield

PARTICIPANTS 6

CURATORIAL
THEME Habitats

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"Join us in kicking off the 2023 Climate Companions festival with a green spaces walk, exploring the hidden gems of Poplar and Bromley. We'll be making stops at some of the beautiful community gardens and celebrating all the green fingered work happening in the neighbourhood, before ending at the magical Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park"

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

" It's 10.30am and no one has arrived, all the usual doubts filter in ... we didn't promote it well enough, maybe people aren't interested... One person a local resident and newcomer to the project arrives, ... is that worse I think? A one person walk? Anyhow we're joined by another and make a start on our way to the first stop.

Jackie is a life long Teviot resident and started the Love Green Flower Pot community Garden in 2012. The garden is a heady aroma of rose bushes in full bloom and a grower is tending to his patch. They have a similar model to R-Urban and other gardens, which is to have small individual allotments in a shared garden space, probably around 12 families in total.

We leave and move onto our second space, Burcham Street Centre and its merry band of gardeners. It's a small walled garden which the group access once a week for their social club, they're mainly an elders group organised by the Wild Women Collective. The group are excited to see us, jumping up and handing out cups of apple juice before proudly giving the garden tour. They grow some food, but mainly it's about getting together as a social club once a week, having a cuppa tea and a natter. A social wellbeing club.

We move on a couple of streets over to Greening Brownfield which sits at the foot of Balfron Tower. This garden is unique, each gardener has a small plot with some shared wild planting areas, a beautiful pond and beehive. This garden is a wonderful collection of potted plants and creative planting which is managed through a shared watering rota. Conversely it feels like less of a community than some of the other spaces we've visited - more a collective of individuals who take turns in the shared maintenance. "

Spaces of Civic Learning

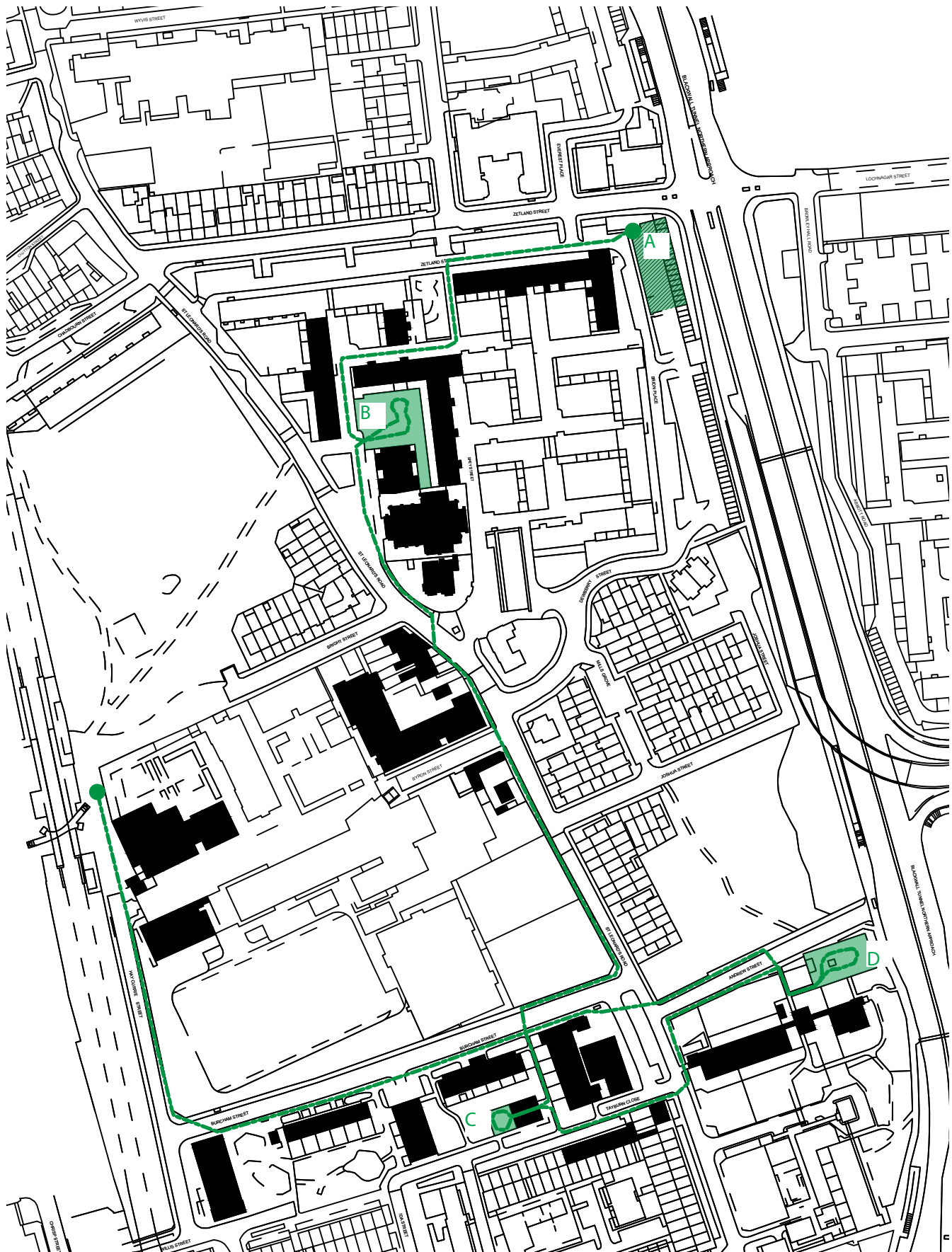


Figure 115 - Plotting the greenspaces walking route, 4 community gardens within less than 1km radius of R-Urban

LOCAL GREEN SPACES

GARDENS

A - R-Urban Poplar

B - Teviot Love Green

C - Burcham Street Gardeners

D - Greening Brownfield



Figure 116 - B1. Love Green communal growing



Figure 117 - C1. Wildlife Pond built by Burcham Street Gardening group

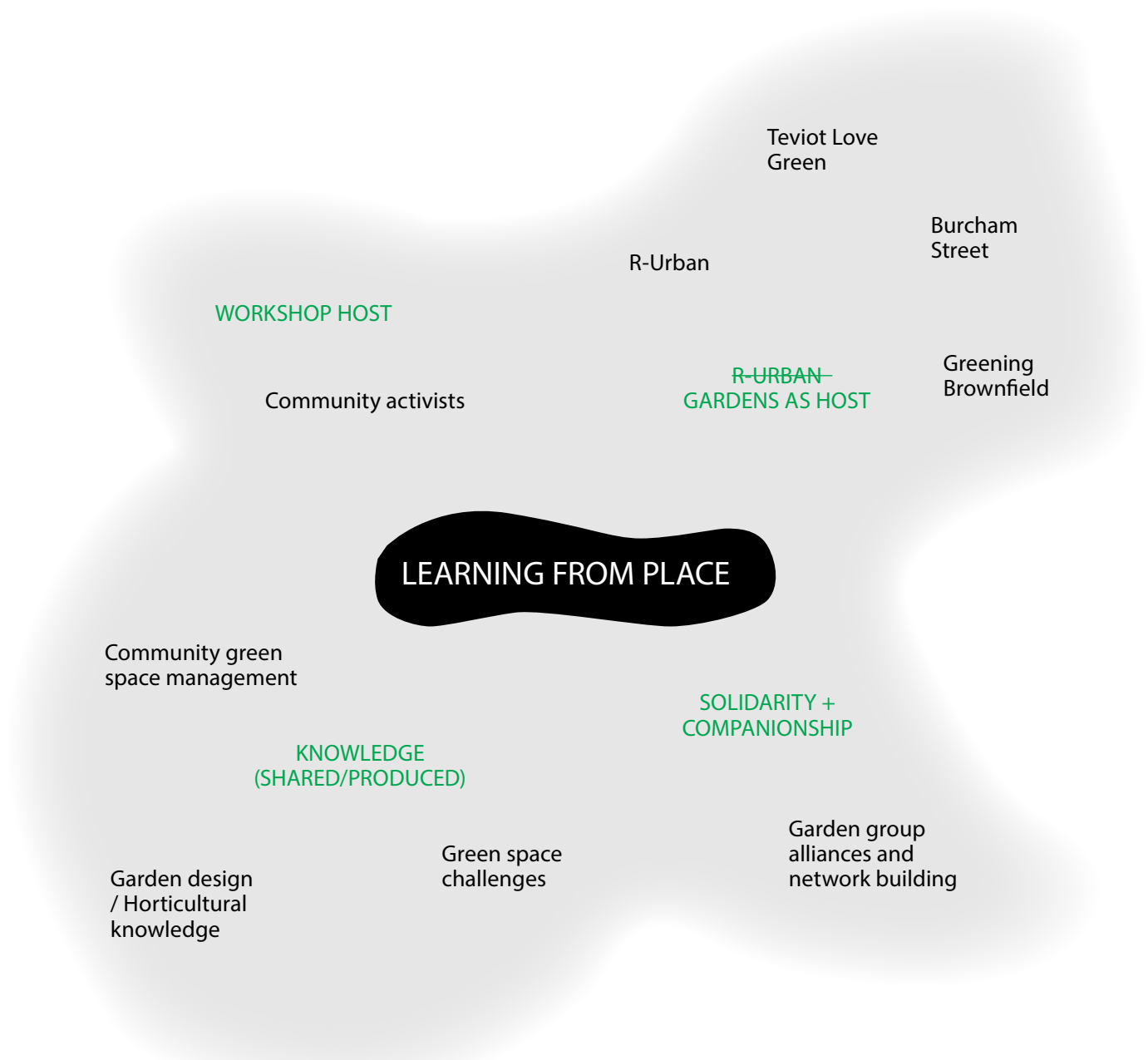


Figure 118 - D1. Eclectic planting in 1x1m sq boxes at Greening Brownfield garden

Learning + Knowledge

☉ Field Trip – Exploring a small network of community gardens through visits and conversations with gardeners/volunteers. An opportunity for each garden to present to small group of participants about their unique garden approach, to observe what is being grown and how. The trip presented a diverse range of approaches to community gardening within a 500m radius of each other.

☉ Connecting, solidarity building – Forming connections between gardens and gardeners, exchanging tips for growing, fundraising, how to deal with the landowner (Housing association) comparing provision of spaces, learning from each other and each gardens approach.



Natural Skincare



Figure 119 - Getting hands-on and learning by mixing natural skincare remedies

LOCATION R-URBAN POPLAR

DATE JUNE 15

TIME 14:00-16:00

WORKSHOP LEAD Maud Barrett

PARTICIPANTS 6

CURATORIAL THEME Low Impact living

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"Join SunnyJar to learn recipes for natural and re-fillable natural skincare. You will learn the health and skin benefits of essential kitchen ingredients (olive oil, Coconut oil, coffee, salt, oats, turmeric...) and how you can safely turn these items into amazing skin care products.

In the session you will make an invigorating body scrub, an all natural deodorant and oat bath soak. You will have a set of your very own natural skin care products to take home, as well as recipe cards to replicate them. Making your own products will save you money, reduce packaging waste and is less harmful for your health and the environment."

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

"Maud is an excellent workshop facilitator and clearly enjoys this role, it's great to have SunnyJar on site all the time. In the workshop we learn how to make bath bombs and soaks with oats, salts and dried aromatics. We learn about skincare routines and Maud very clear that we shouldn't be putting anything on our body which we either don't know what it is or wouldn't eat. Maud does have super clear skin so it's quite a good selling point! We also discuss the power of essential oils and natural herbal remedies, how they support wellbeing and health in the home. It's a calm space, with plenty of time for conversation, questions and clarifications and the recipes are fairly straightforward to follow.

I wonder to myself how many of us will keep up these tips and tricks at home when we're no doing it as a group activity as it feels like some extra effort is required... but maybe this reflective of all decisions and life style choices we make for a healthier planet? They involve being more conscious, taking more care, more time..."

Learning + Knowledge

☉ Practices of self-care – this workshop centres the self and the looking after the body in a healthy, natural and low-impact way. It attempts to simplify and demystify the processes involved in natural beauty regimes and explores how these can be healthier for the body and planet through the production of less waste (plastic/chemical).

☉ Youtube Expert – Like Katrina, Maud is a self-confessed online learner, taking and testing ideas she sees online before using them within her own workshops. This reflects an interesting dynamic with session hosts, being people confident enough/passionate enough to seek out and test ideas without fear of failure, before sharing with others.

☉ Learning by doing – like most sessions this was a hands-on session rather than theoretical, with participants each mixing and making their own natural skincare remedies following Maud's instruction. There is a certain amount of flexibility within the recipes and small handouts allow for continuation of the practice at home.

WORKSHOP HOST

Workshop
space

Lemonade and
hang out

Youtube Expert, self-taught
low-waste expert

R-URBAN AS HOST

CARE BY DOING

KNOWLEDGE
(SHARED/PRODUCED)

SOLIDARITY +
COMPANIONSHIP

Low-waste
skills

Natural remedies,
non-toxic

Self-care and
personal
wellbeing

Bengali Pickles, Preserves and Bangla Feast



Figure 120 - Noore leading an engaged workshop audience for the very first time

LOCATION R-URBAN POPLAR

DATE JUNE 29

TIME 17:30-20:30

WORKSHOP
LEAD Noore Rahman
Aleya Taher

PARTICIPANTS 30

CURATORIAL
THEME Preservation

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

BENGALI PICKLES AND PRESERVES

"Join Noore in this hands on pickle and preserve making workshop, learning all about how to make typical Bangla pickles and preserves. Participants will each get to take home pots of raw mango pickle (Kacha Ammer Achar), Sweet and sour bangladeshi plum achar (Boroi Achar) and tamarind sauce.

BANGLA FEAST

" Join Aleya and the Teviot Bengali Sister for a Bangla Feast, and enjoy sampling the pickles and preserves.

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

"Noore is a little nervous to begin with as she's not often a facilitator and is cooking her mothers recipe for the first time in public. The workshop is to make two traditional Bengali pickles and chutneys. The first is a raw mango pickle - Kacha Ammer Achar, which uses very small Bangladeshi mangoes. The second was a sweet and sour Bangladeshi plum achar called Boroi Achar, this was cooked down in molasses with some spices and little chilli. Both were delicious.

It was a classic R-Urban workshop, some people really engaged and following step by step, chopping and preparing all the ingredients and some just there to hang out and socialise. Aleya who had prepared the main meal a pilau and veg curry dish had invited half the "ladies" in the neighbourhood and some of her old mates from the Balfron tower down to join and visit the space. She's such an incredible community mobiliser, really warm and persistent!

The feast is delicious, one of the best. We (R-Urban) insist on vegetarian meals for inclusivity reasons, but fish is such a huge part of the Bangla diet, it raises interesting questions around role of education, and climate justice and discussions around veganism and food cultures within the group."

Spaces of Civic Learning

- R-Urban Kitchen - although possibly the smallest space on site, the kitchen is the beating heart of the hub. It's the main site infrastructure used, and is always part of the workshops (making tea, getting drinking water, washing up).
- In this workshop it was one of the main spaces used for the cook-along, due to it's small size participants took it in turn and in rotation to see how the pickles and preserves were made.
- The kitchen opens out into the communal table and garden, it's often described as the most welcoming part of the project and is a vital infrastructure within the hub.

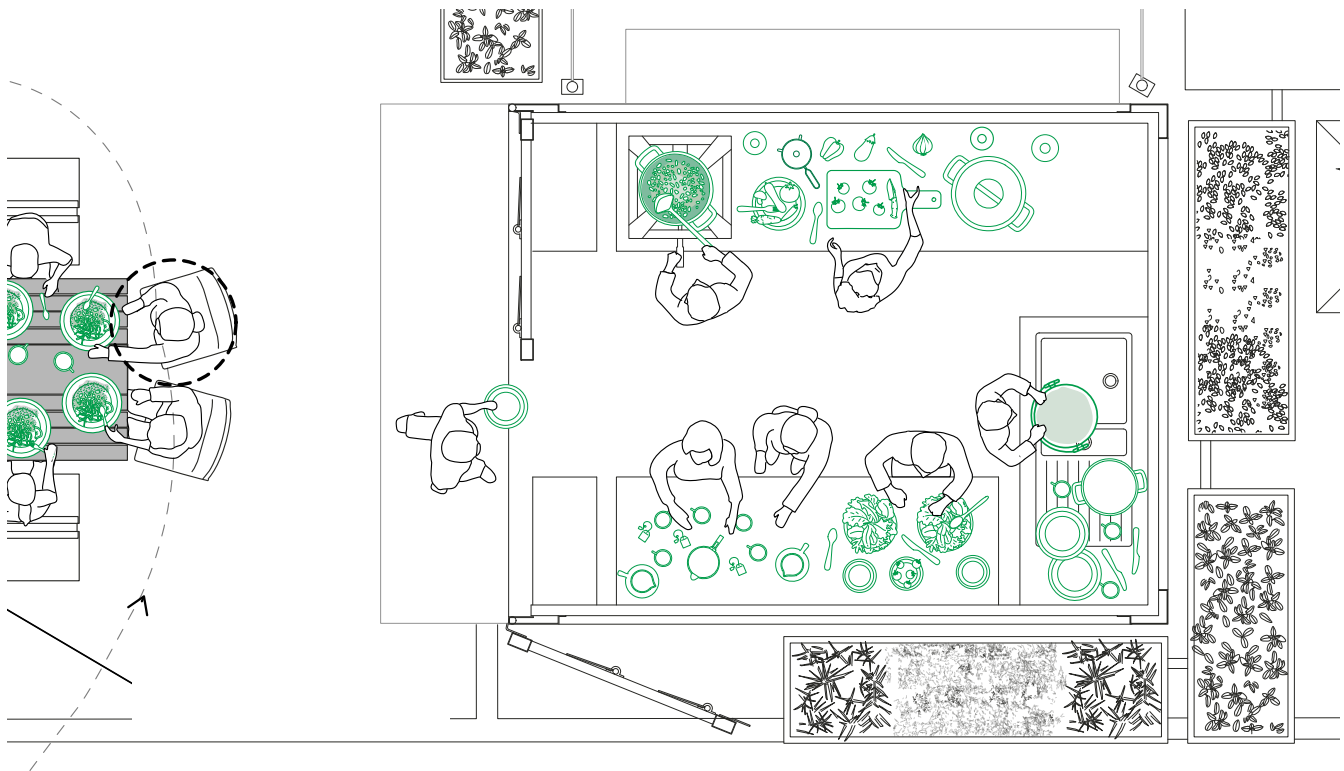


Figure 121 - The micro-containerised kitchen, approximately 5 sq/m and always with an open container door

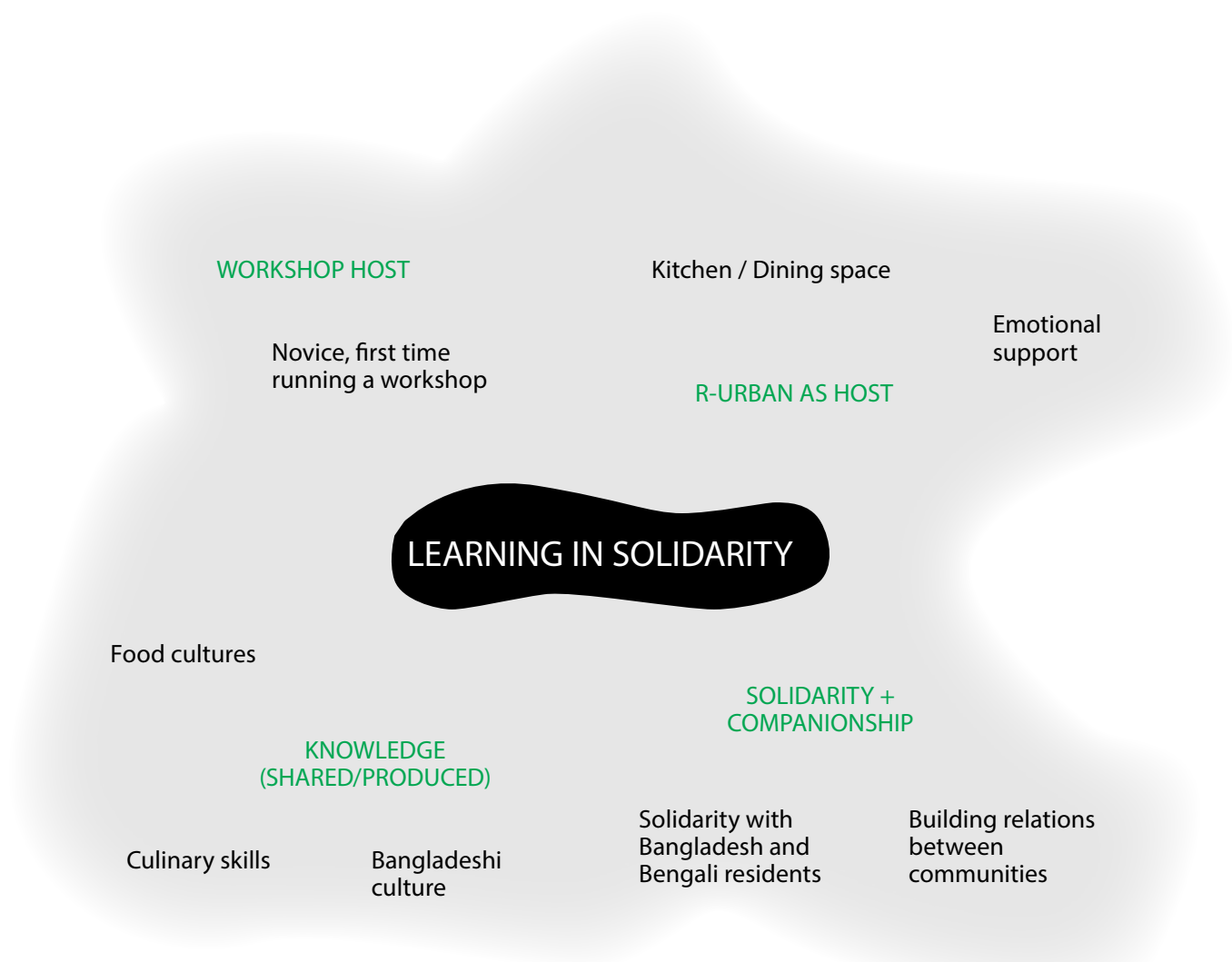
Learning + Knowledge

☉ Cook-along – the session took the format of an active demonstration, with Noore leading an explanation of the ingredients and each step. The cooking activities, food preparation and jarring became communal activities centred around the kitchen and dining space. It's informal nature allowed for wider conversation around foods, preserves and pickles to try.

☉ Sharing family knowledge – the recipes were inherited and passed down from woman to woman within the household, Noore's mother taught her the recipe for the workshop. This recipe is one which links back to Bangladesh, and has been adapted to British ingredients (with some additional Bangla food sourcing).

☉ Preservation of cultures (and climate?). To what extent this workshop addresses the environment and climate change can be contested given the lack of engagement with how food preservation can contribute to less waste or low-impact living. The workshop felt important within the context of the Bangladeshi community, however due to lack of critical framing the session did not develop new engagement with climate and food.

☉ Participant-turned host – Most significantly this session gave an opportunity for a member of the steering committee to host a workshop at R-Urban for the very first time. Creating a nurturing and safe space for participants to transition from learner to teacher has been productive for diversifying the knowledge shared at the hub.



What Lives in Poplar? Bugs and Shrubs



Figure 122 - Enthusiastic citizen scientists conducting a bug hunt in the car park garden

LOCATION	R-URBAN POPLAR
DATE	JUNE 16
TIME	14:00-18:00
WORKSHOP LEAD	Andy Belfield
PARTICIPANTS	14
CURATORIAL THEME	Habitats

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"Join this hands-on workshop where we investigate the world of bugs, invertebrates and the wild shrubs and plants which have seeded at R-Urban. We'll be running bug hunts, making prints, cyanotypes, pressings and sketches which will contribute to a wider study of the ecology of the site."

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

"Feeling very stressed on Friday morning, mainly because I feel out my depth (which I am), but also because the morning is filled with the public works quarterly meet-up. I harbour a general sense of frustration at the about having to organise the day and feel like I'm taking on too much (including the mental space of the baby's imminent arrival!)

The session itself is chaotic and hot. I give a brief introduction to the R-Urban project and site, showing a before and after photo from 2017-present which highlights the transformation of a tarmac car park into a thriving garden hub. I attempt to frame in the context of discussion around ecology and biodiversity which was focus of the workshop with some very simple explanations.

We broke up into pairs or small groups of citizen scientists to explore small one metre square plots of the site; first observing, then drawing, sketching and printing to form part of a site exhibition about the places ecology. I pair up with an old regular and he chooses a single planter outside the Office, we begin the observation and soon start to notice new plants and bugs which at first glimpse go unnoticed... ladybug larvee, woodlouse spiders, zebra spiders ... quite a lot of life in a tiny urban space."



Figure 123 - Zebra Spider found on a raised bed trough planter



Figure 124 - Wild pea growing in the green boundary at R-Urban



Figure 125 - People power, flower pressing the gathered samples for citizen science site survey



Figure 126 - Exploring the world under our feet, zooming in on more-than-human life.

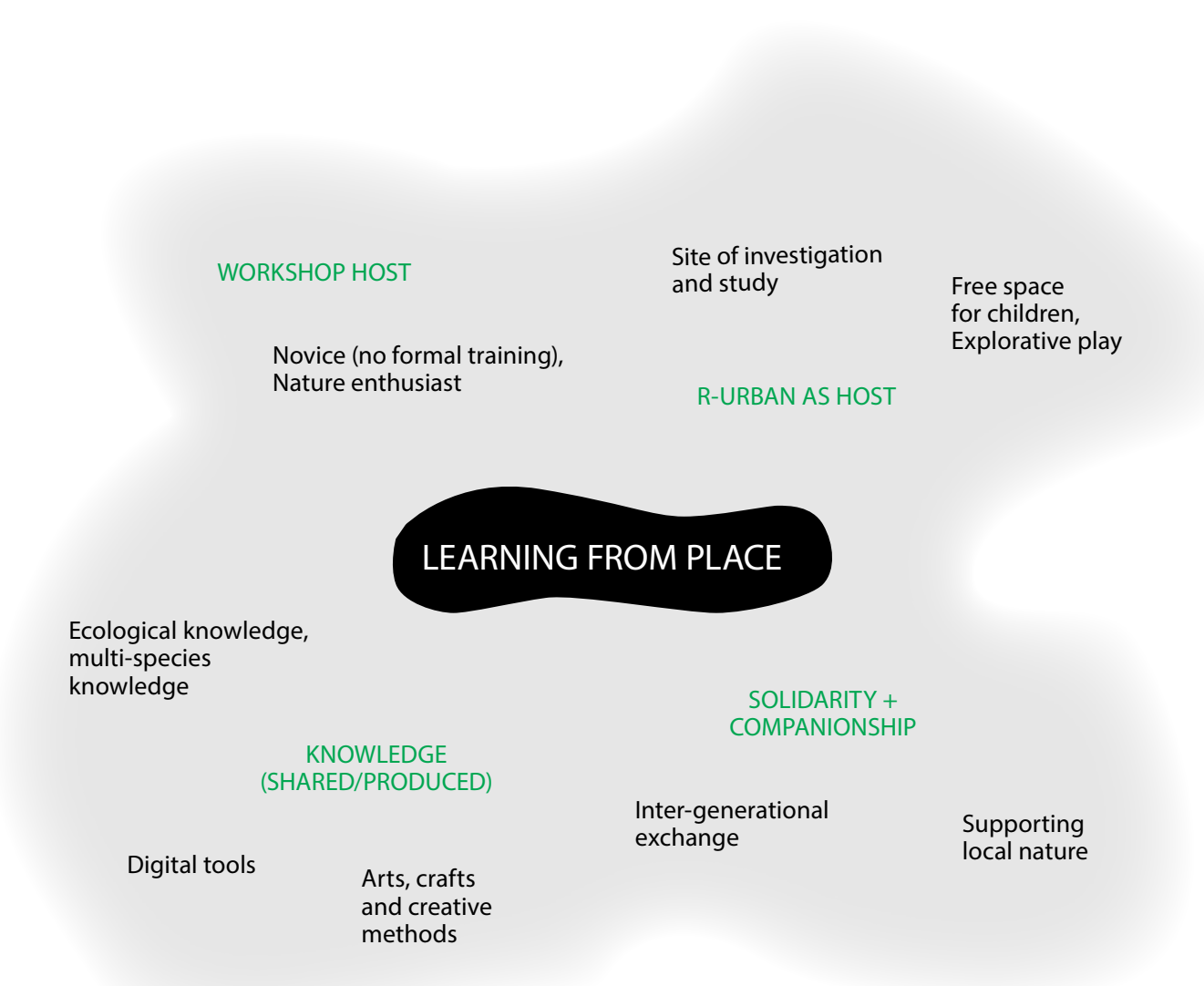
Learning + Knowledge

☉ Community Science – unlike citizen science this workshop was looser in its aim, merely to document and observe the species living on site. The workshop focus on bugs and invertebrates appealed to a younger audience and the session was structured as if a forest school session. Community science focuses on group investigation and observation of a site condition but does not provide hard scientific outputs. Pairs of “scientists” were encouraged to closely observe 1m square chosen at random, before unearthing and recording, drawing, sketching as many species as possible.

☉ Amateur enthusiasts – This workshop was a demonstration of collective willing to learn despite ignorance of a condition. Google photo ID was used to help with identification

and researching on what was found in the bug hunt. Despite the lack of expertise the sessions facilitated a wider understanding of the ecology of the site, and participants shared facts and knowledge about species identified.

☉ Inter generational learning – This workshop was also an opportunity for inter generational knowledge exchange with participants ranging from 0-70+



Wild Poplar Foraging Walk



Figure 127 - Wild foods neighbourhood walk, inspecting a patch of wild barey in the long shadow of Canary Wharf

LOCATION	TEVIOT + LANGDON PARK
DATE	JUNE17
TIME	10:30-15:30
WORKSHOP LEAD	Ru Kenyon
PARTICIPANTS	14
CURATORIAL THEME	Wild Food, Herbs and Wellbeing

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"After the success of our 2022 foraging walk Ru Kenyon is back to guide us on a spring/summer neighbourhood foraging walk. We'll see what bounty the streets have to offer, learn about foraging responsibly, and start to think about how we could re-imagine our streetscapes as a vibrant food source. Lunch will be provided on return to R-Urban, followed by a foraged food workshop and discussion."

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

"We walk 5m out the gate before Ru stops us to explore the first plant. He asks given the time of year what food crops can we expect to find - Flowers, and early summer fruits is typical for June. Conversely compared to gardening, wild salad greens are not yet in season. We stop and huddle behind some parked cars with Ru pointing to the blue berries of a thorny looking bush.
 "Does anyone know what this is?" [no response]
 "It's Mahonia, the berries are tasty, but the seeds are incredibly bitter."

Ru then talks about how this is a unseen food crop, the plant is selected by urban designers for defensibility (thorny), to prevent people hiding in urban areas but few people eat the berries.

We move forwards and discover a crop of Dune Berries hiding over a wall, again very exciting as Ru doesn't often see these in London. As we make it to the edge of the carpark (100m from our start) he points out something which looks like a sweet pea. We're informed it's a wild pea, the flowers are edible but not the pea itself. Ru then explains that in the online foraging community people will tell you that you'll die if you eat these but he's confident and so are the group in his knowledge!

We leave the park and head round to Wyvis Green. Along the edge of the run down, poorly maintained playground, we then discover the burdock plant digging its roots deep beneath the tarmac. It's a foragers essential, Ru explains how to harvest the stem which has a high starch content (the same can be done with artichoke). We sit around on the pavement asking questions and taking a breather, an unlikely place to find wild food. "

Spaces of Civic Learning

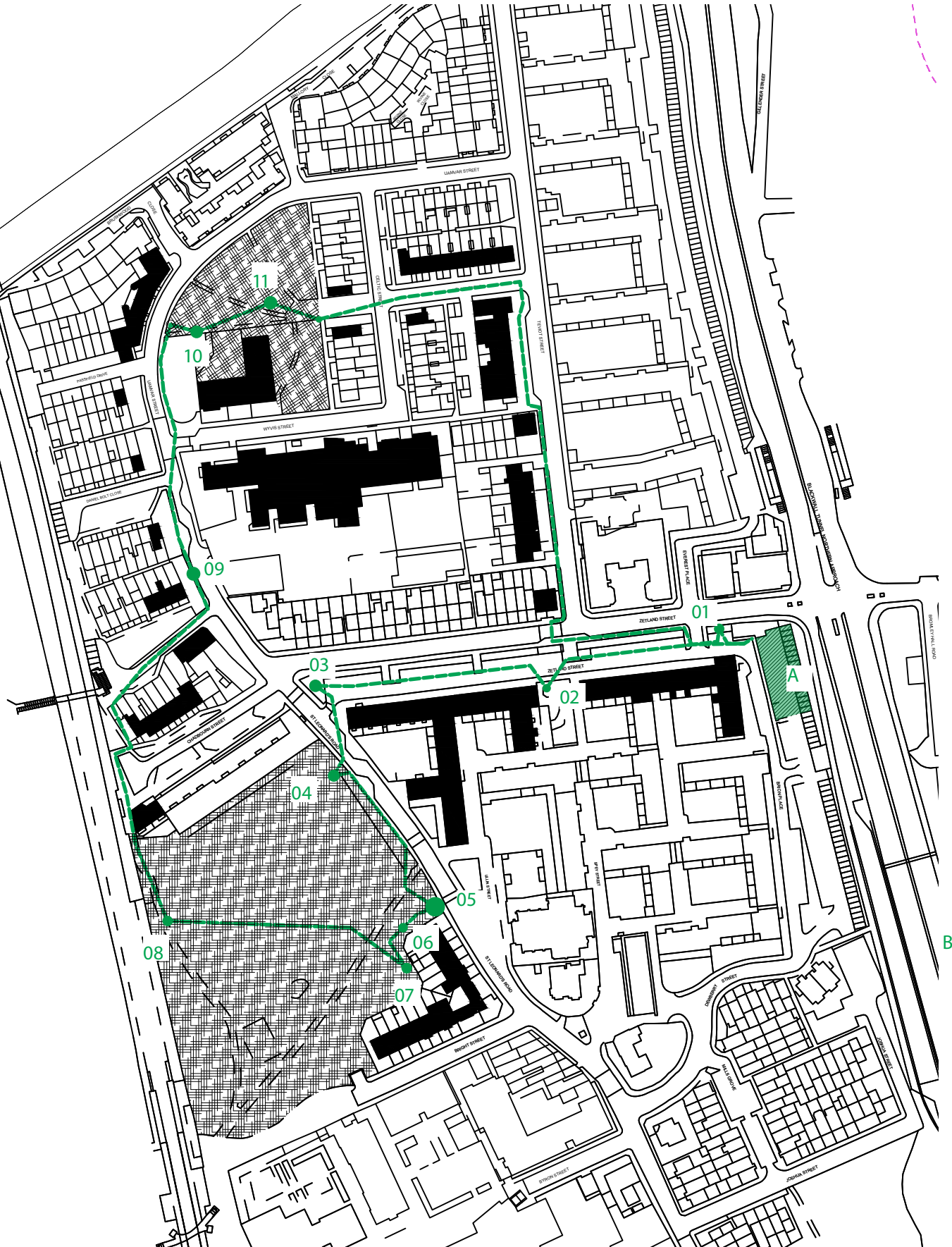


Figure 128 - Mapping the walking route and recording all the locations we stopped to observe and taste wild foods

FORAGING WALK KEY

GARDENS

A - R-Urban Poplar

WILD FOOD

- 01 - Mahonia Berries
- 02 - Dune Berries
- 03 - Wild Pea
- 04 - Wild Wheat
- 05 - English Cherry
- 06 - Gorse
- 07 - Black Elderflower
- 08 - Palm
- 09 - Horse chestnut
- 10 - Dock Root
- 11 - Common Lime Tree, Linden tea



Figure 129 - Dune Berries 'A london surprise!' (an uncommon wild berry)



Figure 130 - Harvesting under ripe cherry for 'sour olives', prepared at R-Urban



Figure 131 - Harvest salad of wild flowers and leaves gathered during the walk



Figure 132 - Unlikely place for a healthy Dock plant, growing through the ballcourt fence

Natural Cleaning Workshop



Figure 133 - Getting hands-on by mixing natural cleaning products to use at home

LOCATION R-URBAN POPLAR

DATE JUNE 22

TIME 14:30-16:30

WORKSHOP LEAD Maud Barrett

PARTICIPANTS 19

CURATORIAL THEME Low Impact Living

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"Are you conscious about what's in your cleaning products and how it may affect your health and the environment? Why don't you join Sunny Jar and learn how to make your own natural cleaning products, reduce the use of toxic chemicals and live a low waste lifestyle!

In this relaxed and informal workshop, you will discover the many household uses of natural soap, bicarbonate of soda, citric acid and white vinegar. We will show you how bicarbonate of soda can be used for a multitude of things, including an air freshener, carpet deodorizer and heavy duty cleaning paste and how to turn a simple jar into a bicarbonate of soda shaker.."

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

" The premise is to learn about natural, eco-friendly cleaning methods for the home. Maud starts by discussing why we need to clean, and how we do it at home. A small group to start with just a handful of participants but this grows as the workshop goes on.

Maud makes the point that every time you buy a new bottle of spray cleaner you're essentially paying for water and storage. This can be a much more economical way of cleaning and it takes up less space in the house. We're reminded that like so many sustainable practices, it's partly about un-learning bad habits of consumerism and a return to simpler "older?" ways of being, living like our grandparents used to.

The group makes, scented vinegars for cleaning sprays, citric acid toilet bombs, bi-carb of soda shakers and all take little good bags home. It would be interesting to follow up with the group and ask them how many kept it going after the workshop. The workshop draws to a natural conclusion and half the group decide to hang around for a lemonade and the next workshop which was hosted by Eka."

Fermented Foods Workshop



Figure 134 - Eka leading the fermentation workshop by sharing basic principles for home fermentation

LOCATION R-URBAN POPLAR

DATE JUNE 29

TIME 17:30-19:30

WORKSHOP
LEAD Eka Davies

PARTICIPANTS 24

CURATORIAL
THEME Preservation

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"Join Eka Davies to learn all about the art of fermentation in food and drinks. In the workshop you'll learn all about the cultures of fermentation, how we can preserve foods for longer and the health benefits in doing so. During the workshop you'll make a jar of Curtido to take home, and get to sample plenty of fermented delights."

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

Eka is hosting the next workshop, she's such a warm and knowledgeable host someone who's really following their passion with integrity. The session starts with a round of introductions, and the fermented foods they enjoy. We circle the table, suggestions included borsht, kimchi, sauerkraut, fermented tofu, pickles, kifer, sourdough and more...

Eka foregrounds the health benefits of fermentation, how 99% of bacteria are good bacteria, and fermentation is all about getting those good bacteria active in the gut microbiome. The focus and links to health and wellbeing are strong and understood in the group.

Eka, "people are now once again interested in what we did in ancient times" Referring to the long history of fermentation in world cultures. Again, this resonates with the previous workshop and processes of un-learning, relearning, or reconnecting with different knowledges, some of which have been lost or forgotten.

In parallel across the street is a group of young lads, hanging out, smoking weed and doing Nitros Oxide. Eka's workshop is punctuated by the sound of balloons inflating, before they chuck their empty Nos canister towards R-Urban which feels hostile. It sets a stark context for the small bubble we exist in behind our fenced boundary. Cameron steps up (I run scared) and he asks them politely to do what they're doing elsewhere as we're trying to run a workshop, and they move on with little fuss, the tension seems to have gone and everyone is back to their ferments."

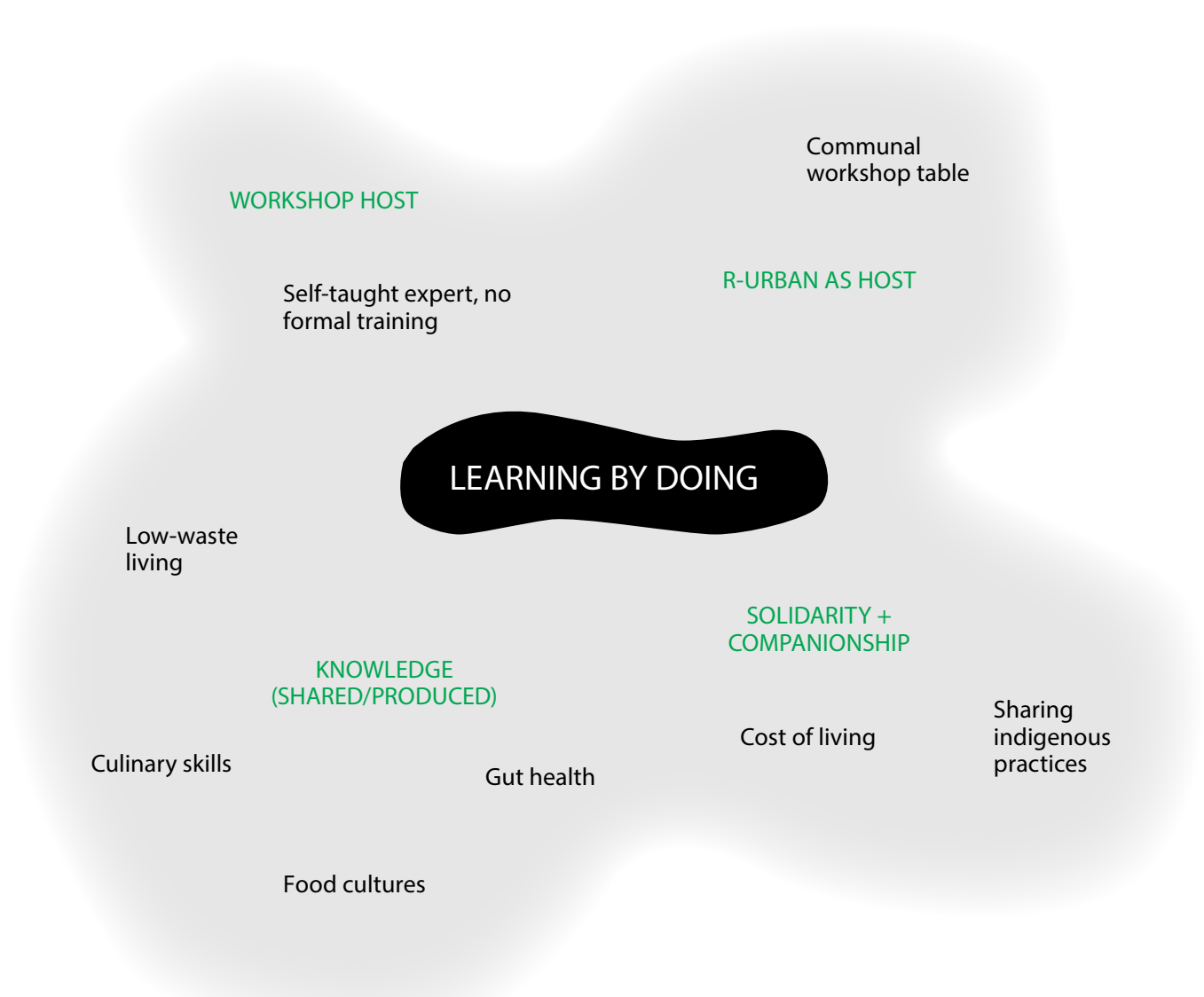
Learning + Knowledge

☉ Revisiting Indigenous practices – a theme throughout the workshop was Eka’s knowledge around cultural fermentation, and how each nation and social group has it’s own unique relationship with fermenting as a form of preservation. Eka referred to this a reconnecting with our past, with indigenous knowledge which dates back thousands of years. A practice of re-learning.

☉ Self-taught expertise – Like many hosts Eka’s knowledge is self-taught over years of experimentation with ferments at home. Her knowledge and interest are driven by passion for the practice, and only recently has started teaching others about ferments.

☉ Learning by doing – The workshop was structured around all participants making their own jar of ferment to take home, this hands-on approach is felt to more realistically lead to adoption of the practices at home.

☉ Fermenting for preservation – Conversation around the ideas of fermentation foregrounded how we historically used it as a preservation method, for storing harvested veggies and seasonal gluts for use later in the year. This practice for using locally grown food started a wider conversation about food waste and modes



What Lives in Poplar? Bee Habitats



Figure 135 - White banded bumblebee harvesting pollen from Nasturtiums in the garden

LOCATION R-URBAN POPLAR

DATE JUNE 23

TIME 14:30-18:30

WORKSHOP
LEAD Serena Dang

PARTICIPANTS 3

CURATORIAL
THEME Habitats

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"Join Serena to learn all about bees and their role in the local ecosystem. We'll learn about the plants they need to thrive, how their pollination supports our very existence and what we can do to support them. The workshop will be hands-on, making bee hotels, identifying the many different types of bee in the garden and learning through play and craft."

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

" Serena arrives around 2.30pm to start setting up for her workshop, one participant arrives but we wait in hope for others to join... we wait... and wait. We decide to pass the time making Cyanotypes until 4pm, when we families may join ... the wait continues.

Sadly, by around 4.30pm it dawns on us that this is the group. I feel terrible for her, she's put in so much work and cares so much about the topic, but for whatever reason (the weather? a lack of promotion? A lack of interest in the topic?) only one person came. Serena is still cheery despite all this, but I know from my own experiences that it's deflating. I feel personally sad and responsible, what could have been an empowering process for one of our regular participants was a bit of a damp squib and I regret not promoting this harder.

Despite the disappointment, we have a chat between the 4 of us about bees. Studying the beautiful photos Serena has managed to take on her phone and go about hunting bees on site. We spot the common white banded bee and many honey bees enjoying the nasturtium, lavender and oregano flowers. One to do again I think at a later date.

"

Herb Box Making



Figure 136 - Cutting planter templates from recycled lorry tarpaulin

LOCATION	MAKING FOR CHANGE
DATE	JUNE 24
TIME	10:30-15:30
WORKSHOP LEAD	Claire Swift - Making for Change
PARTICIPANTS	12
CURATORIAL THEME	Low-impact living

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"Join us at 'Making for Change' where we'll be learning how to make window sill planter boxes from re-used lorry tarpaulin. In the workshop you'll learn about pattern cutting, waste fabric and how to stitch and bind it together into the perfect window sill herb bed. This would be a good time to make a planter to bring to July's herb propagation session."



Figure 137 - Participant herb box in situ at home

Limehouse Cut Canoe



Figure 137.1 - Canoeing down the Limehouse Cut Canal
Source: public works

LOCATION	LIMEHOUSE BASIN
DATE	JUNE 24
TIME	16:00-19:00
WORKSHOP LEAD	Moo Canoes
PARTICIPANTS	7
CURATORIAL THEME	Habitats

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"Ever wondered what lives and makes its home in the Limehouse Cut Canal? Come and explore our local waterway with the support of Moo Canoes. You'll learn how to paddle and steer a canoe safely before exploring the habitats of the birds, bugs and aquatic life which reside in our unlikely waterway. The Moo canoes group also run regular litter picks so we'll be offering a hand in making our local waterways better places to be.

"



Figure 138 - Coots making nests in murky waters
Source: Nana Maolini

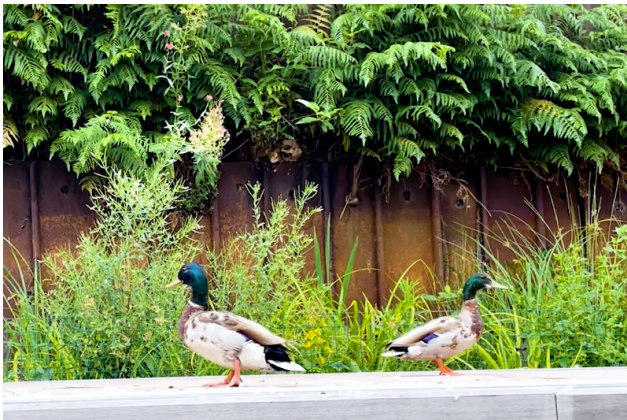


Figure 139 - Man-made nesting habitats
Source: Nana Maolini

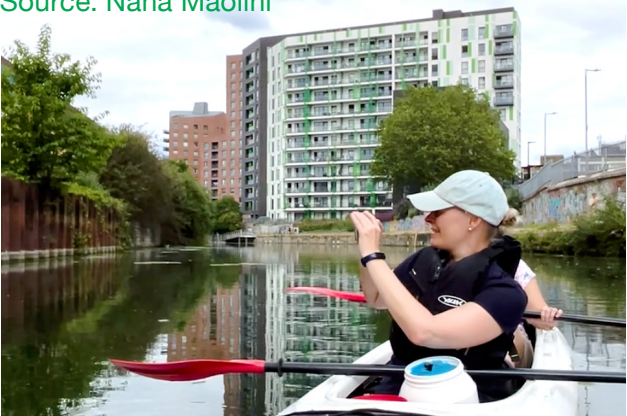


Figure 140 - Photographing wildlife on the cut
Source: Nana Maolini

Waste Milk? Butter and Cheese Making Workshop



Figure 141 - Boiling spoilt milk to extra whey and curd
Source: public works

LOCATION R-URBAN POPLAR

DATE JUNE 29

TIME 17:30-19:30

WORKSHOP
LEAD Cameron Bray

PARTICIPANTS 21

CURATORIAL
THEME Preservation

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"Join us at R-Urban to learn all about how to make cheeses and butters from milks, creams and nuts for a vegan alternative. We'll explore the basics of churning, how we can make delicious paneer cheeses for curries and more."

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

"Unlike the workshops hosted by Eka or Ru who are really masters of their craft, Cameron's approach is more "we learn by doing together", not necessarily being an expert but someone who has done some research and has the confidence to host. For the workshop we're making Labneh (strained yoghurt, in between a cheese and yoghurt), jar-churned butter, ricotta cheese and a cashew ricotta.

The processes are all quite quick and can be done using milk which is just about to turn. The cashew butter involves soaking and blitzing, with some added vinegar. Ricotta making is also quick, bringing milk up to high 80s before adding lemon juice to separate the curd from the whey. Jar churned butter is simply double cream put in a jar and shaken until buttermilk and butter separate. This is a great one for kids and is probably the star of the show in terms of audience engagement.

It's one of those workshops which is quite perplexing, lots of engaged and active participation. Great workshop numbers and shows the power of food as a mode of engaging wide audiences... even if the link the climate is a little tenuous?"

What Lives in Poplar? Bat Walk



Figure 142 - Using bat detectors on dusk walk to locate bats

LOCATION	TEVIOT, JOLLY'S GREEN AND LANGDON PARK
DATE	JUNE 29
TIME	20:00-22:00
WORKSHOP LEAD	Iain Walker
PARTICIPANTS	6
CURATORIAL THEME	Preservation

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"Join Bat expert Iain on a dusk Bat walk in the neighbourhood. We'll learn all about bats, their role in the local ecosystem, why they're important and how we can support their habitats. The walk will start at 21:30, but beforehand we'll be making bat boxes and bat prints for the R-Urban Poplar site and having conversations about how we can support wildlife in the local neighbourhood.."

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

"After the chaos of the Cheese making workshop, we're extending our evening into a bat walk with London bat expert Iain. We start with a round of introductions and whether we've ever seen a bat in Poplar? The only bat sighting was by Jolly's Green, so this seems like a good first stop on our visit. We commence with the bat box building while we learn from the bat expert Iain. He delights in telling us about their preferred habitats, the likely species we'll see in London (Pipistrelle) and their family units.

"Bats have been on this earth for 60 million years, we have only been around for 2 million... so they know a thing or two about survival"

Iain's interest in bats is as an ecologist, working for the LB of Lambeth parks department, carrying out ecological impact assessments for future developments. He seems fairly optimistic about the state of biodiversity in London.

"Compared to the rural monocultures of agricultural land and the use of pest and herbicides to control pests, Bats have better habitats in cities in the UK"

We tune into Bat ultrasound (50 Gigahertz) and start scanning the tree lines aiming to hear a clicking/kissing noise which is how they communicate with each other. Jolly's Green is silent... as dusk sets in we try Langdon Park, scanning widely. Iain points over to a thicket of trees in the bottom corner of the park ... soon we hear the first clicks. We've found them! The next 10 minutes is a magical experience, hearing them first on the detectors, before our eyes adjust to see bats circling and swooping."

Spaces of Civic Learning

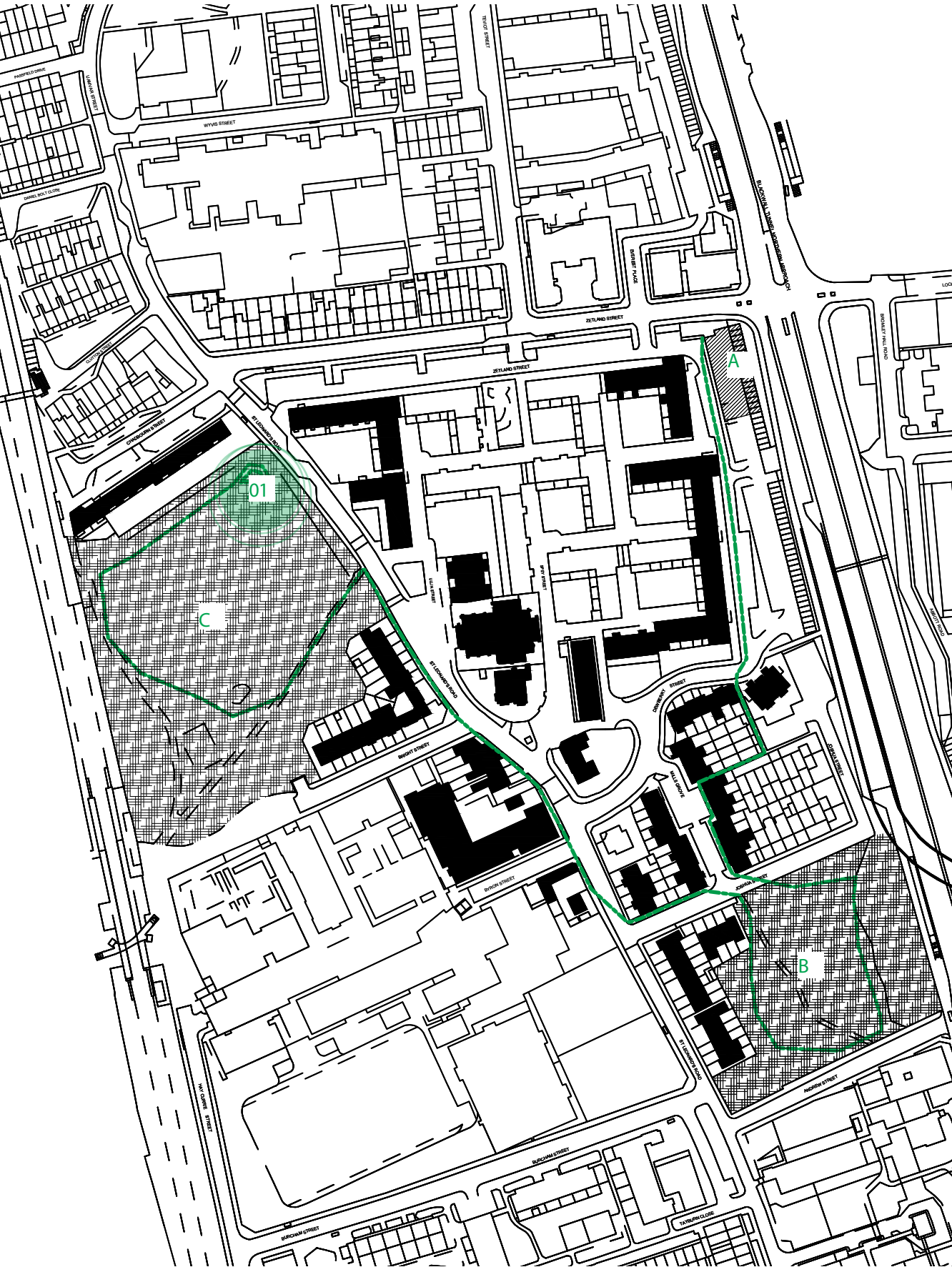


Figure 143 - Mapping the walking route which mainly focussed on open green spaces as likely food sources

BAT WALK KEY

LISTENING LOCATIONS

A - R-Urban Poplar
B - JOLLYS GREEN
C - LANGDON PARK

BAT SPECIES OBSERVED

Common Pipistrelle



Figure 144 - Searching woodland habitats on Jolly's Green for bat activity



Figure 145 - Finally locating the bats in Langdon Park after dusk

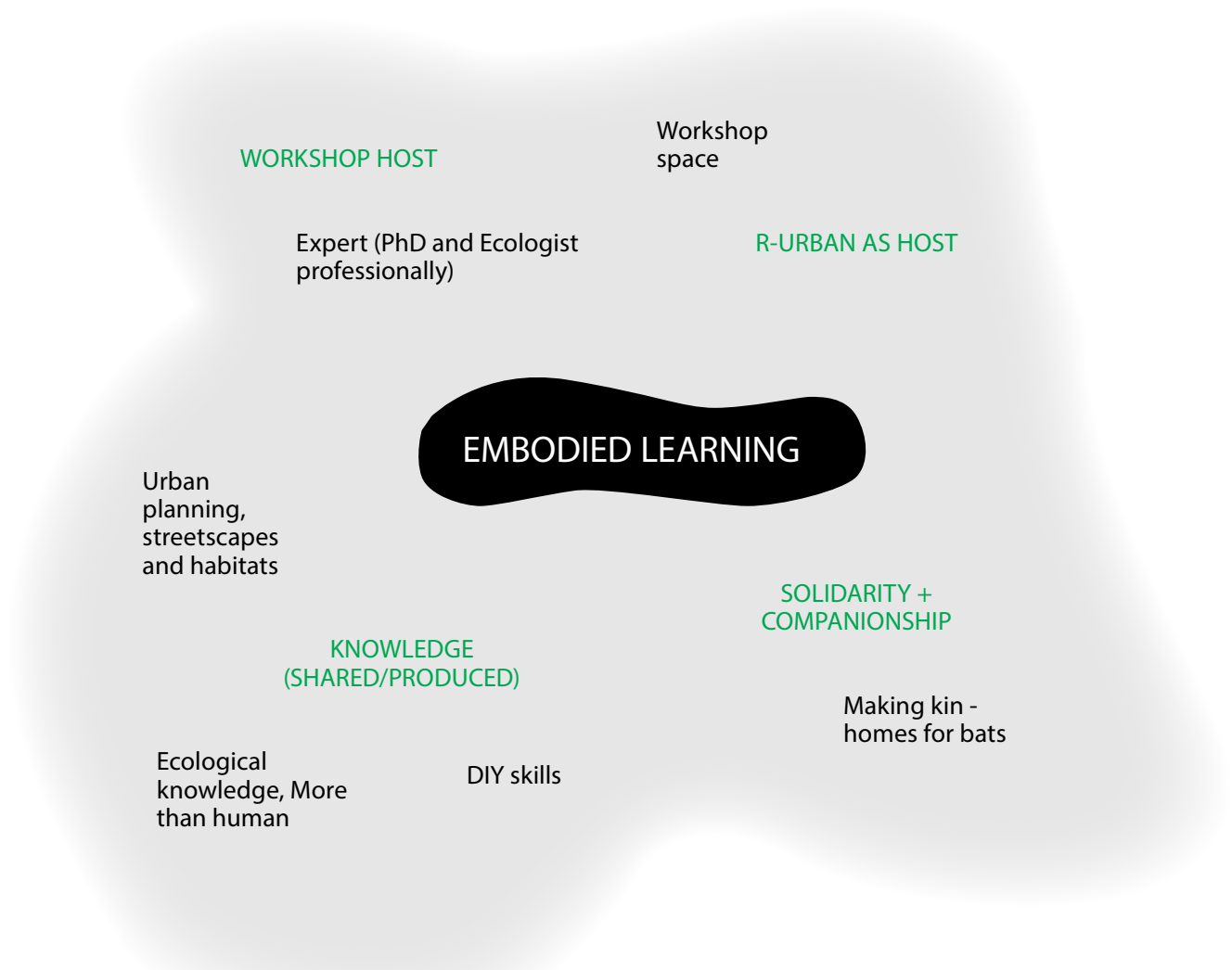
Learning + Knowledge

☉ Embodied learning through sound and body – The walk was a fairly unique learning experience, using a bat detector to try to tune into the sonar calls of local Pipistrelle Bats. It connected users with another sense, allowing us to hear the soundscapes and echo location of the bats. This practice involved the walking and hunting for these strange clicking sounds, pointing the detector and walking slowly around local green spaces and parks. Through a fairly simple technology participants were able to see their local urban surroundings through a new dimension.

☉ Linking small actions to multi-species – The workshop began with a hands-on DIY Bat box building activity. This enabled the group to think about creating new habitats for bats and the

conditions in which they thrive/survive. Linking small community actions to improve or offer new nesting habitats was another way of connecting between humans and other species.

☉ Expert knowledge (Academic) – The workshop was lead by London bat expert, Iain. Who's knowledge around bats and ecology was based around a PhD research and over 20 years of experience working as an ecology officer for Lambeth council. Unlike many of our hosts, he brought an wealth of formally accredited knowledge into the learning experience for participants.



Mushroom Mysteries



Figure 146 - Understanding the life needs and make-up of the King Oyster mushroom

LOCATION	R-URBAN POPLAR
DATE TIME	JUNE 30 20:00-22:00
WORKSHOP LEAD	Alani Shafique
PARTICIPANTS	14
CURATORIAL THEME	Wild Foods, Herbs and Wellbeing

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"Join Alani and LEAP Micro AD in exploring the world of mushroom and fungi, learn all about how to grow your own with small starter kits, their role in the ecosystem and mysteries of their mycelium networks."

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

"Alani sets up for the workshop around 1pm, they take great care in setting the dining table scene and praying that it doesn't rain. Guests arrive slowly, some extremely knowledgeable amateur mycologists and others learning for the first time.

We start with introductions, favourite mushroom and pronouns (all the more important for the queerness of mushrooms). Alani starts with the description of the typical anatomy of the mushroom, on a beautifully drawn flip chart of mushroom knowledge. It's calm but intense, the knowledge shared is that acquired through years of experimentation and the audience are interested in technical details, fine points.

Alani discusses mushroom cultivation and introduces the next stage mixing up buckets of mushrooms to be harvested in a few weeks for a mushroom feast. The mixing is performative but also sterile, using alcohol sprays to sterilise and minimise contamination which is important for food crops. We mix enough for 10 buckets – 10% spawn, 2-5% supplements, 85% substrate, 70% hydration. In theory each bucket could produce a harvest of between 50%-200% biological efficiency."



Figure 147 - King Oyster mushroom bucket recipe



Figure 148 - King Oyster Mushroom at 'pinning stage'



Figure 149 - Fully grown King Oyster mushrooms

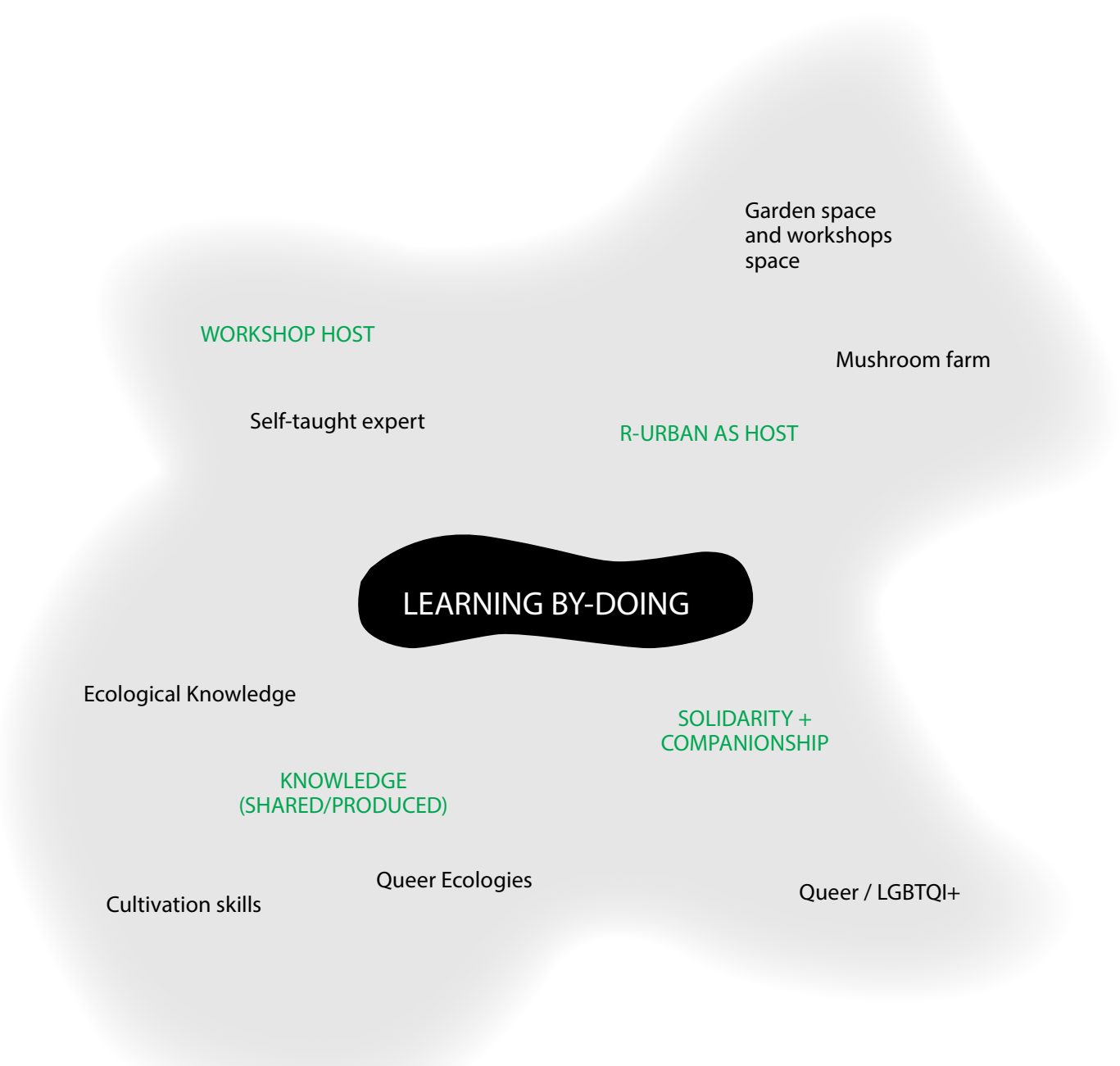
Learning + Knowledge

☉ Self-taught expertise – Alani fits within the category of self-taught expert as session facilitator, developing her own knowledge through curiosity, passion and many years of workshops in and around London, exploring the world of cultivation and wild mushrooms in public spaces. This knowledge is informal, not formally recognised through qualification.

☉ Queer Ecologies – a big effort was made during the workshop to link the mysterious world of fungi to queerness by the session facilitator. Recognising multiple identities, genders and fungi's fluidity was something which many participants related to.

☉ Learning by doing/helping – Rather than everyone taking mushroom kits home as has previously been done, the workshop was

organised around preparing buckets which would be managed by Alani, with the idea of having a mushroom feast as a collective celebration later in the summer. This collective effort was performative in its mixing, taking place within the not-so-sterile space of the garden.



Herbs and Health Propagation, Foods and Remedies



Figure 150 - Starting with introductions and sharing everyone's favourite herb

LOCATION	R-URBAN POPLAR
DATE TIME	July 01 10:30-15:00
WORKSHOP LEAD	Katrina Wright, Andy Belfield, Maud Barrett
PARTICIPANTS	13
CURATORIAL THEME	Wild Foods, Herbs and Wellbeing

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"This workshop will explore the wonders of herbs. We'll learn how to propagate different herbs at home. This will be followed by learning about herbal brews and their benefits, before we eat a home-grown herby lunch. After lunch we'll explore some herbal remedies and balms for improved health and wellbeing. "

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

"Katrina leads the group around the garden, taking cuttings from herbs we find on site. "You want cuttings to be around 6 inches in length, which is two finger lengths approximately"... The group starts at the mint, before heading over to lemon balm, then back to white lavender, sage, rosemary and Thyme. Katrina instructs everyone to remove all the leaves and flowers except two before placing in water. These should in theory produce roots which could then be potted on to a wet compost. Finally, the group start dividing, and re potting Basil and Oregano bought from the supermarket. "Supermarkets don't want you to keep the plant alive for more than a few weeks! They want you to buy new ones! So, the plants and seeds are packed really tightly" This method will give you multiple healthy clones and increase your herb supply. Katrina makes it look so effortless, but my home propagations have often failed.

For our herby lunch we're preparing new potatoes with herb butter, Squash with pesto made from sage, basil and pistachio and couscous with lemon and mint. We harvest 3 kilos of potatoes from the grow bag on site. The meal comes together collectively and sit down to eat together, reflecting on a calming morning. It's surprising to hear that some attendees are travelling as far away as Brixton to come to these workshops. We wrap up, wash up, bailout the stinking greywater before dealing with the vile food waste compost... heavily decomposed and stinky. A smelly end to a lovely day."

Natural Dyes Clothing Repairs



Figure 151 - Learning how to naturally dye cotton fabrics

LOCATION R-URBAN POPLAR

DATE July 06
TIME 14:00-16:30

WORKSHOP
LEAD Alisa Ruzavina

PARTICIPANTS 11

CURATORIAL
THEME Low-impact living

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"Join Alisa to learn how to make your own naturally dyed fabric and how those fabrics can then be used to repair and embellish your existing garments using shashiko and blanket stitch."

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

"The session starts with a group round of introductions, personal reflections on fashion and clothing repairs. It's a space which allows Alisa to talk about sustainable fashion, how natural dyes is a completely other imperfect thing compared to the clothes we buy in shops... and this is its charm which should be celebrated.

The workshop is first about making dye vats, the first being premade with avocado skins (A red/mauve hue). The second is made in the workshop using onion skins, making a deep mustard yellow. As part of the demonstration participants are going to make dyed socks or canvas bags which have all been pre-treated with Alum. The group get to work preparing their items, learning simple stitches, or using rubber bands to make tie dyes.

Those who take part really enjoy the workshop, and all very happy with their naturally dyed wares... even those who were a little worried about wearing such unconventionally bright clothes!"

Climate Companions Pot Luck Feast



Figure 152 - World food cultures shared with others all lovingly prepared by participants

LOCATION R-URBAN POPLAR

DATE July 06
TIME 16:00-20:00

WORKSHOP
LEAD All

PARTICIPANTS 23

CURATORIAL
THEME Celebration

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

"A celebration of world cuisines at R-Urban to reflect upon and draw to a close the 2023 climate companions programme. A pot luck feast to celebrate the world cuisines of Poplar - bring a dish! We only ask that if you bring a dish it's big enough to share with others!"

EXTRACT FROM AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

" This was a new format for us... would anyone bring food? The answer was an overwhelming yes.... Those who couldn't cook... bought, and the collective output was a delightful feast.

The menu included:

Masala Chat

Pilau

Garlic Daal

Bean salads

Fried Baji

Vegetable Pakora

Brownies

Chocolate cake

Pani-puri

It was a wholesome moment which brought together a lot of the regular participants over the past few weeks, and felt like a much more low key end to the programme than previous year with the performative feast. The feeling was still celebratory, with many thanking us for organising the programme and sad that it was coming to an end... thankfully we had a summer programme lined up ... the learning and sharing continues ..."

17 workshops
over 26 days

Climate Companions 2023 in numbers

29 participants
attended 5+
workshops

253 participations
169 different attendees
Ages 5 - 70+

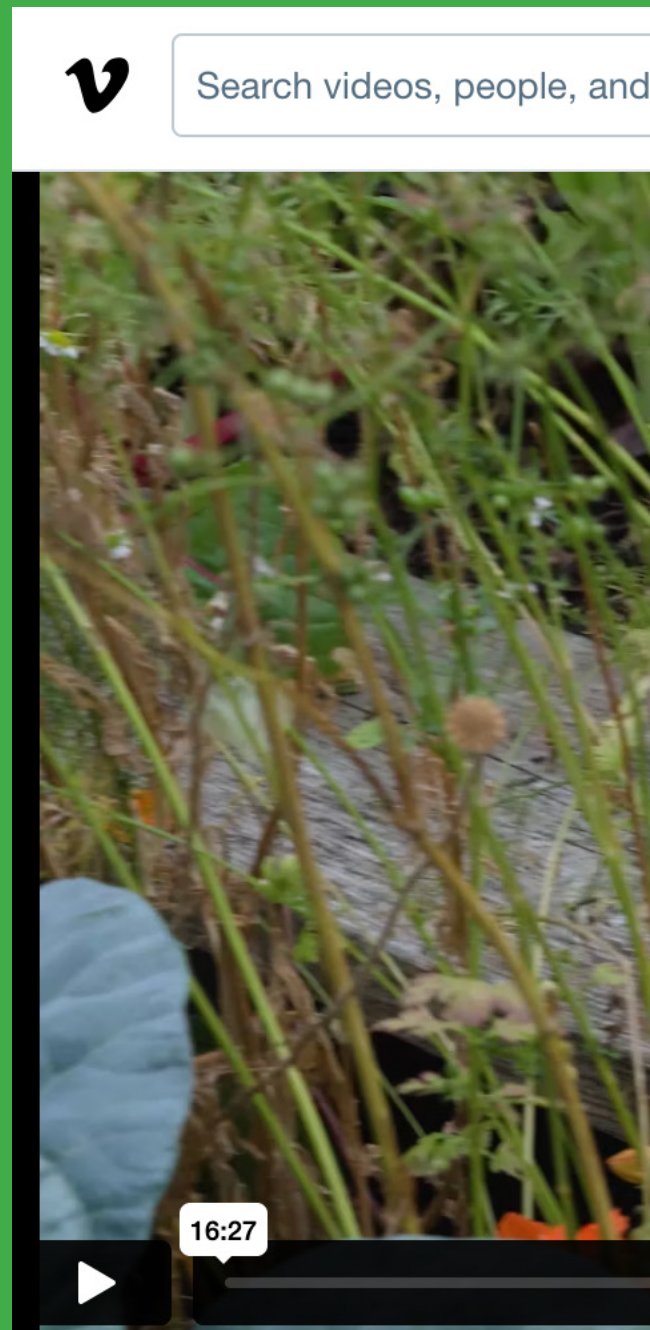
**16 collaborating
partners
(artists, experts,
community
associations etc)**

Climate Companions 2023 Film

Shot and Edited by Nana Maolini

Produced by Andy Belfield

Figure 153 - CC23 Film Screenshot
Source: Vimeo, Nana Maolini



Please scan
the QR code
or
Click the image
below to view



more

Q

?

Pricing

Log in

Join

R-URBAN



POPLAR

A video player showing a close-up of bright orange nasturtium flowers with green leaves. The video player includes a progress bar at the bottom and standard controls like volume, subtitles, settings, and a full-screen button.

V.

**R-Urban Poplar
and the Neighbour
2023-24**

urhood

R-Urban Poplar 2023-24

Hub Timeline

● 2023 - Weekly Companions and Repairs workshops, Climate Companions festival of learning (June-July). SunnyJar become R-Urban enterprise tenant, moving into unit at start of the year. Weekly green skills volunteering programme starts for the first time on site and is managed by MAD LEAP. Further co-building workshops focus on improving site infrastructures e.g. greywater systems, and making new habitats (Ponds).

● 2024 - Continuation of bi-weekly repairs and care programme run by SunnyJar. Continuation of the weekly green skills volunteering organised by MAD LEAP. New programmes focussed on habitat creation and biodiversity are combined with supporting young children gain access to nature via weekly after school club. The hub is also home to new enterprise (London Wild Fruits) who contributes a workshop programme around wild foods and fruits. Two new initiatives and cooperatives are supported, Teviot People's Kitchen and Haircycle.

Hub Infrastructures

● 2023 - New Mushroom Farm, Completed renovation of a further two workspaces. New Greenhouse space built at the end of 2023. New wetland habitats including bog willow bed soak away, greywater system improvements and new pond habitat

● Classroom renovation and energy retrofit - sheep wool insulation and natural build. New Anaerobic Digester (AD) with increased capacity for processing food waste and gas storage. Increased site food growing through new allotments and raised bed containers.

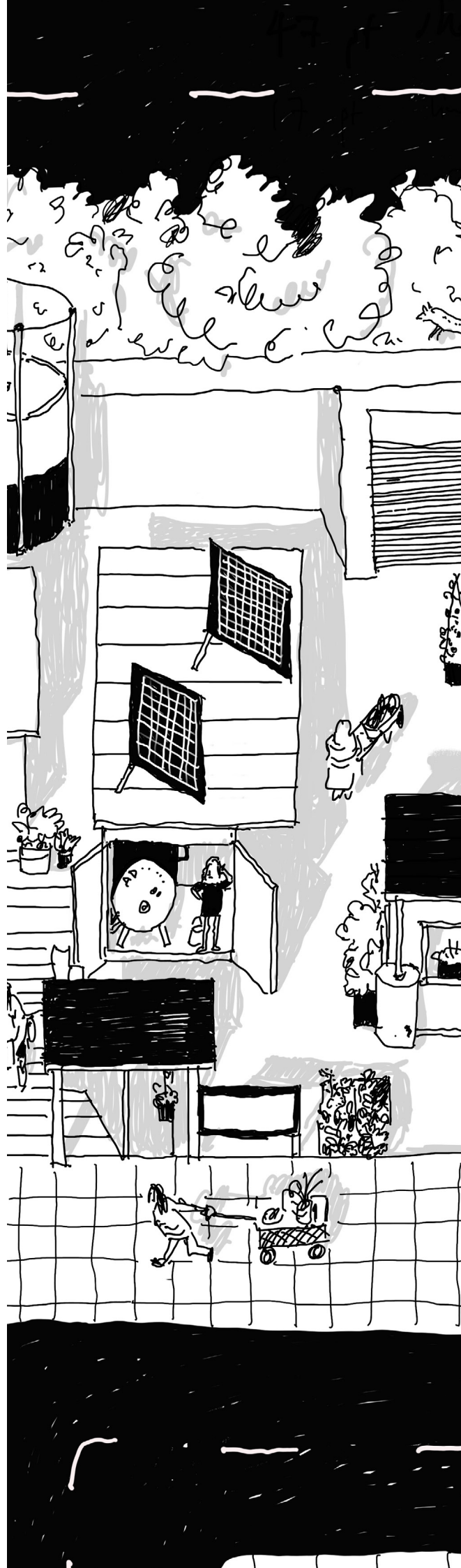
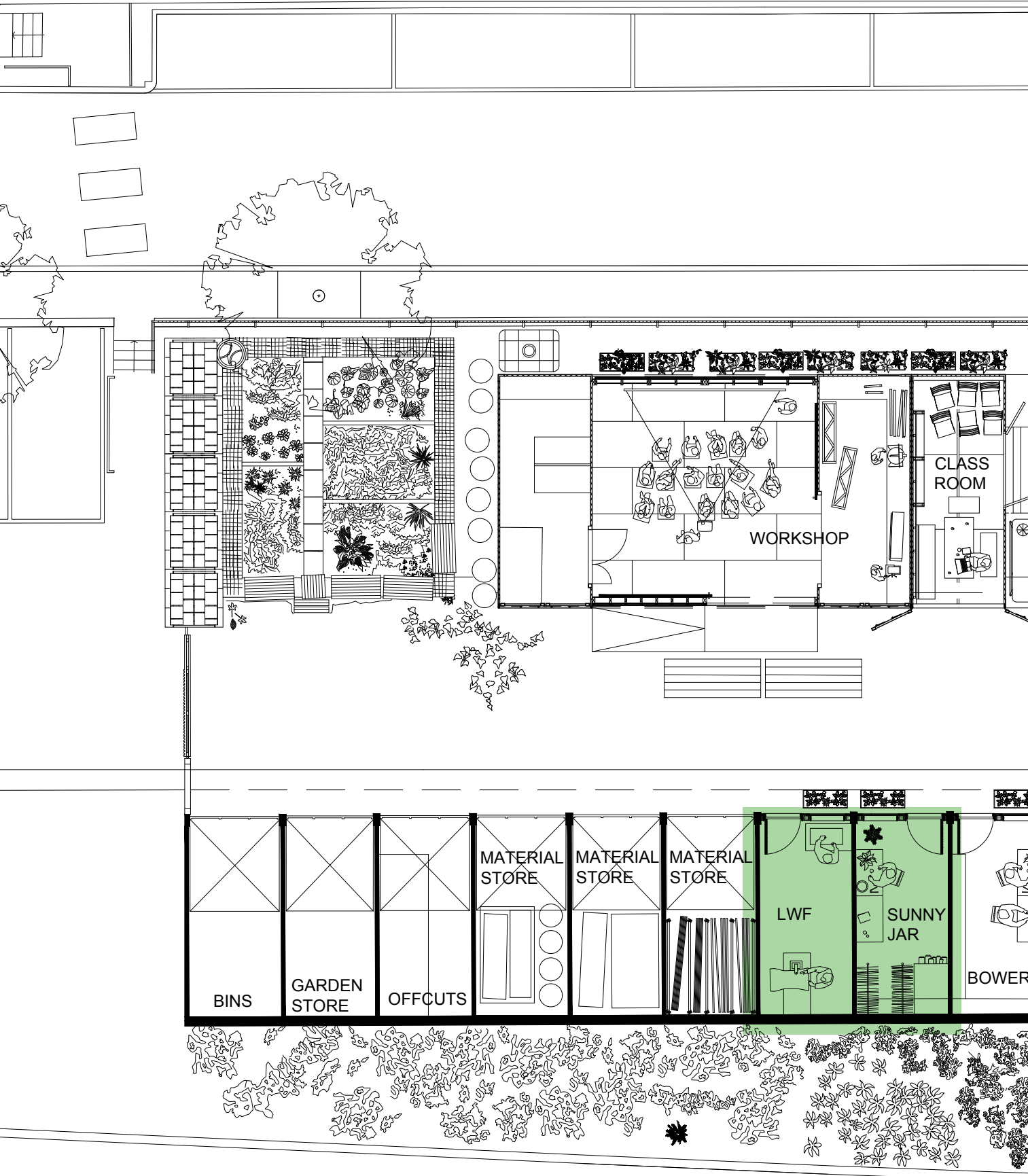


Figure 153.1 - R-Urban Poplar 2023
Source: public works, drawing by Cameron Bray



R-Urban Poplar 2023



Hub Timeline

- Additional garages are converted into new workshops in late 2022, early 2023. MAD LEAP as part of the SOURCE project create a mushroom farm two of the units. Growing King Oyster Mushrooms for local sale.
- Two further garages are converted into workshop/offices for enterprises who were participants in Climate Companions (London Wild Fruits and SunnyJar.

- Further investment in site green infrastructure, focussed primarily around habitat creation (pond, and bog planting) with some additional greenhouse capacity.

Figure 154 - R-Urban Poplar 2023. Highlighting new site infrastructures and residents

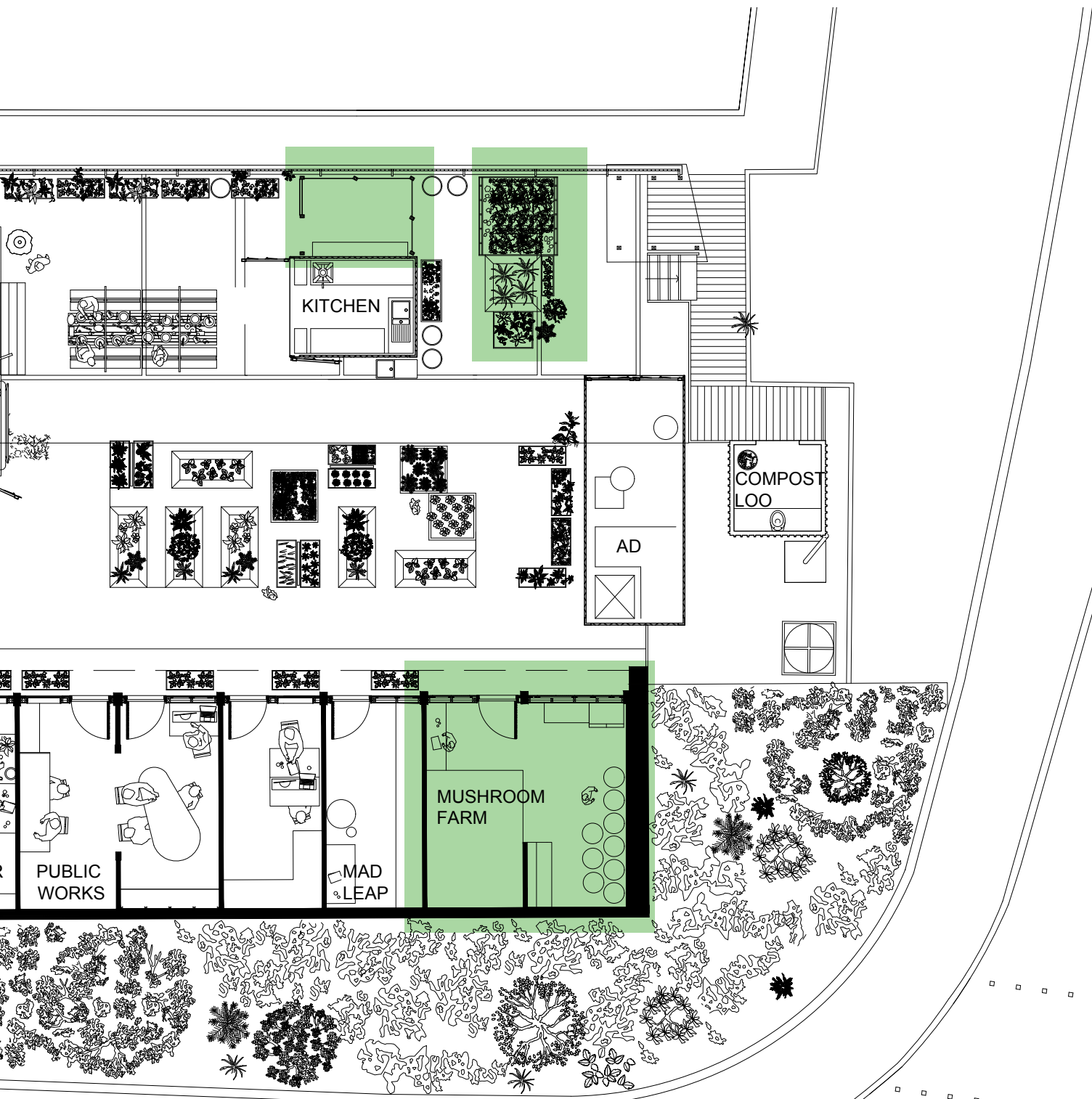
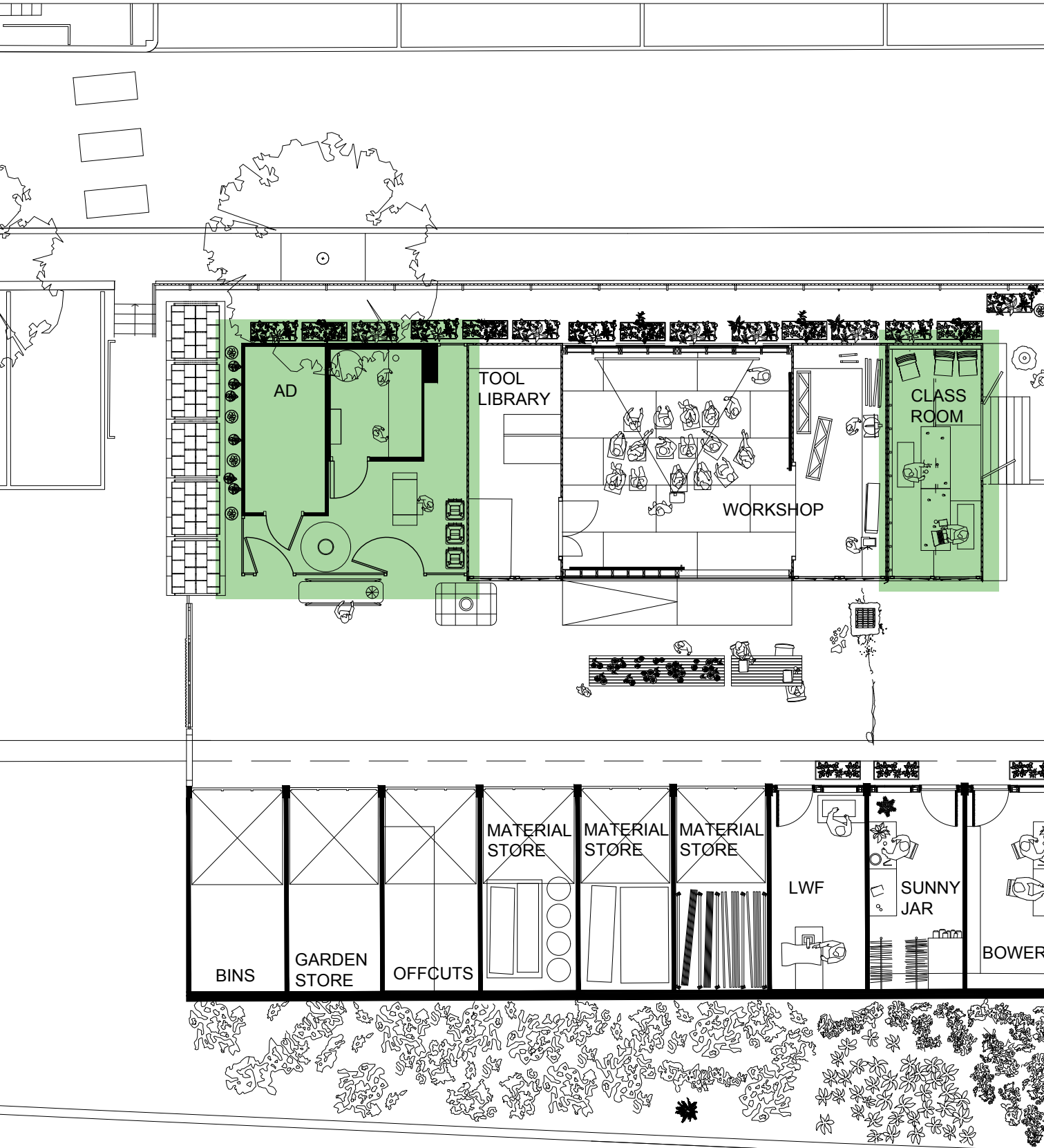


Figure 155 - R-Urban Poplar 2023 - Intensified site food growing and office use





R-Urban Poplar 2024



Hub Timeline

- Renovation of the existing container classroom with funding from the Tower Hamlets Community Carbon Reduction Grant for retrofit works to existing spaces. Funding used to fully insulate the existing space for use all year round.
- New Anaerobic Digester system installed in Winter 2024 by MAD LEAP New AD has larger

capacity for food waste, developed as part of the SOURCE project. New site location due to accessibility and operational requirements.

- Allotment growing beds relocated around the entrance area, these beds are more accessible, and consolidate growing to one end of the site.

Figure 156 - R-Urban Poplar 2024. Highlighting new/refurbished site infrastructures and residents

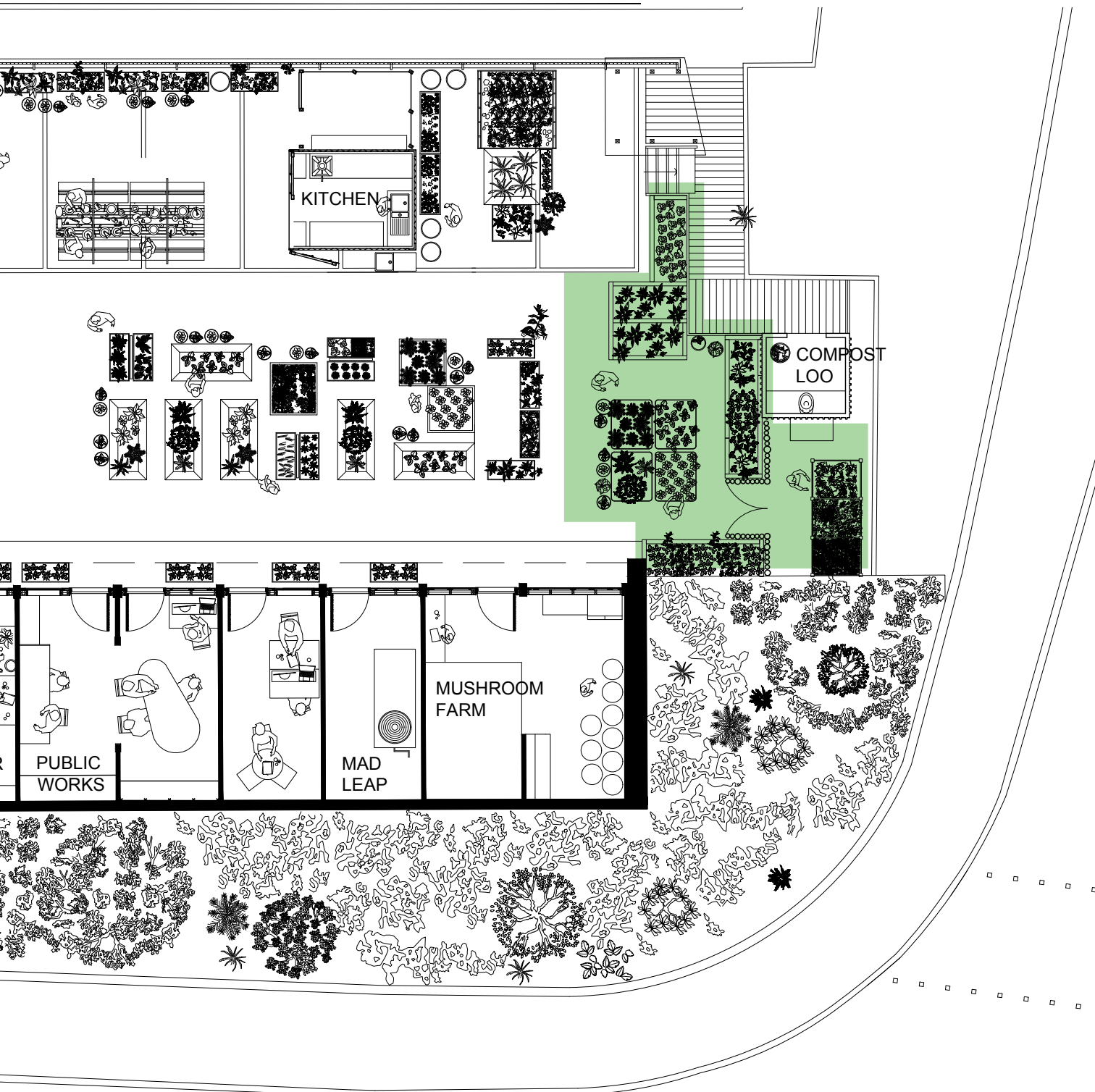


Figure 157 - R-Urban Poplar 2024 - Looking into the site from Brion Place





Civic and Climate Learning 2023-24

Green Skills Weekly Volunteers

What – Collective green space care and community food growing. With a focus on teaching horticultural skills, no-dig and permaculture based growing methods for a regular volunteer group.

When – Weekly throughout the year from 11am-1pm, followed by a R-Urban community lunch which is open to all 1-2pm.

Facilitators – Sessions were facilitated by Katrina from MAD LEAP, Community lunches were prepared by the Teviot People's Kitchen.

Type of learning, knowledge shared/produced

– This is a weekly drop-in session open to all and run by Katrina. The focus is on developing horticultural knowledge more deeply than one-off workshops aiming to support volunteers towards qualifications or further accredited training. The knowledge focuses on permaculture and no-dig methods and in parallel the volunteering helps to maintain and care for the communal R-Urban garden beds.

AIM:

Learn
horticultural
skills for
community
food growing and
composting

Outputs – Several weekly volunteers have gone one to do AQA Level 2 food growing training programmes with MAD LEAP, with one volunteer now employed to work on the SOURCE circular food system project.



Figure 158 - Volunteer Garden Harvest 2024

Bug Club

What - An after school nature club for 7-11 year olds which took place at R-Urban Poplar and involved neighbourhood exploration through walking, in partnership with Woolmere Primary School.

When - 17 weekly sessions between May-October 2024. Workshops took place on Fridays 3.30-5pm

Facilitators - The programme was curated by public works in partnership with numerous workshop facilitators and hosts. In total 10 external workshop hosts took part, and the programme enabled two R-Urban regulars to become paid facilitators.

Type of learning, knowledge shared/produced - Each workshop started at the school gates at pick-up and then involved a 'walking bus' to R-Urban Poplar (around 20 minutes). Each walk was an opportunity to explore the local

AIM:
Engage young children in nature and connect them to the neighbourhood

neighbourhood. Once within R-Urban a series of workshops were designed to engage learners in the natural world e.g. foraging, bug hunts, bio-material workshops, building, crafts, cooking etc.

Outputs - In total the programme reached 225 children and parents. The group walked a total of 188.5 miles. The main output was raising environmental awareness for both children and parents



Figure 159 - Fantastic foragable foods workshop, Bug Club 2024
Source: public works



Figure 160 - Nature listening devices workshop, Bug Club 2024
Source: public works

Repair and Care

AIM:

Teach skills
and share
knowledge
for low impact
lifestyles

What – a public programme of workshops and events which focus on low-impact living. Focus on environmentally friendly domestic practices (e.g. natural remedies) and repairs (textiles, pottery).

When – Sessions were Bi-weekly between April and November on Thursday afternoons (24 over two years)

Facilitators – Sessions were facilitated by SunnyJar Ecohub, involving multiple facilitators in their network. This is in-kind programming in exchange for rental of their office unit.

Type of learning, knowledge shared/produced – Sessions focus on learning by doing, they are guided or demonstrated by SunnyJar experts but always hands-on for participants as they learn new skills and techniques.

Outputs – Participants were better equipped to apply low-waste living practices within everyday life. Skills taught involved: sewing, stitching and textile repairs, mechanised sewing machines, natural dyes, natural cleaning, plastic free alternatives.



Figure 161 - Upcycling fabric waste into bags and plant pot holders
Source: public works



Figure 162 - Kintsugi Pottery Repairs
Source: public works

Nature Hub - Habitat Co-Builds

AIM:

Build new habitats and learn about biodiversity and more than human life

What – Programme of co-build workshops to collectively build new habitats for species to increase biodiversity at R-Urban.

When – Intermittently over the past two years. These sessions tend to be clustered e.g. over a number of consecutive Thursdays. Usually they are full day workshops.

Facilitators – Sessions are facilitated by public works with additional expertise brought in depending on the subject or habitat being created.

Type of learning, knowledge shared/produced – Learning is very much hands-on and by doing, the workshop is a way of first understanding local biodiversity and what humans can do to support it through intervention. The practices focus on natural materials and engage in DIY skills and using tools correctly.

Outputs – The workshops have realised a number of new site habitats and demonstrations of natural building. This includes:

- ☉ Greywater treatment system
- ☉ Willow bed soak away
- ☉ Wildlife pond
- ☉ Green sedum container roof
- ☉ Cob earth tandoor
- ☉ Raised bed wicking planters
- ☉ Wetland Ferneries
- ☉ Green waste compost beds
- ☉ Wormeries



Figure 163 - Micro pond and bog habitats



Figure 164 - Kitchen greywater filtration reed beds

Teviot People's Kitchen

What – Based on the success of food related programming between 2021-23, R-Urban has supported a new enterprise which in their words:

"Over the last three years, the R-Urban project has grown a strong network, making space for local cooks, gardeners and composters to gather, share and learn together. Thinking long-term, we propose a community-led cooperative.

The People's Kitchen will formally bring together a group of local legends, investing in the skills, training and networks required for a just food system. This project tests the viability of a co-operative business model involving a co-designed public programme to make space for conversation and learning with R-Urban's wide audience and a programme of training for co-op members."

R-Urban has supported this new women led group by providing space, resources and a public audience for their workshops. The group are funded by the JustFACT programme.

When - Workshops were intermittently programmed between April and October in 2024, taking place on Thursday evenings and weekends.

AIM:

Support a new cooperative of cooks, growers, picklers and fermenters

Facilitators – The cooperative is a group of 5 people primarily women, the project is supported by public works.

Type of learning, knowledge shared/produced - Often workshops focus on sharing food cultures through sharing recipes and skills via active cooking or gardening demonstrations. This knowledge is often rooted within the family or via sharing of specific food cultures.

Outputs – In 2024 the group hosted over ten workshops and one market. These were attended by over 200 participants. The group continue into 2025 with new focus around community-led markets for sharing recipes and produce at R-Urban.



Figure 165 - Launch Event for TPK in May
Source: public works

Figure 166 (Opposite) - Aleya cooking Naan for TPK Bangla Feast



Relationscape R-Urban 2024

RELATIONAL NETWORKS

- 01 - Youth Engagement Network
- 02 - Just Food and Climate Transition
- 03 - Climate Companions Project
- 04 - Bug Club Project
- 05 - SOURCE Local Food System Project
- 06 - Actors of Urban Change Network
- 07 - International Architecture Bienalle Rotterdam

- 08 - ProSHARE Research Living Lab
- 09 - R-Urban Network
- 10 - WRDTP Post Graduate Research Position
- 11 - Climate Studio Project



Figure 167 - R-Urban Relationscape 2024, mapping project networks

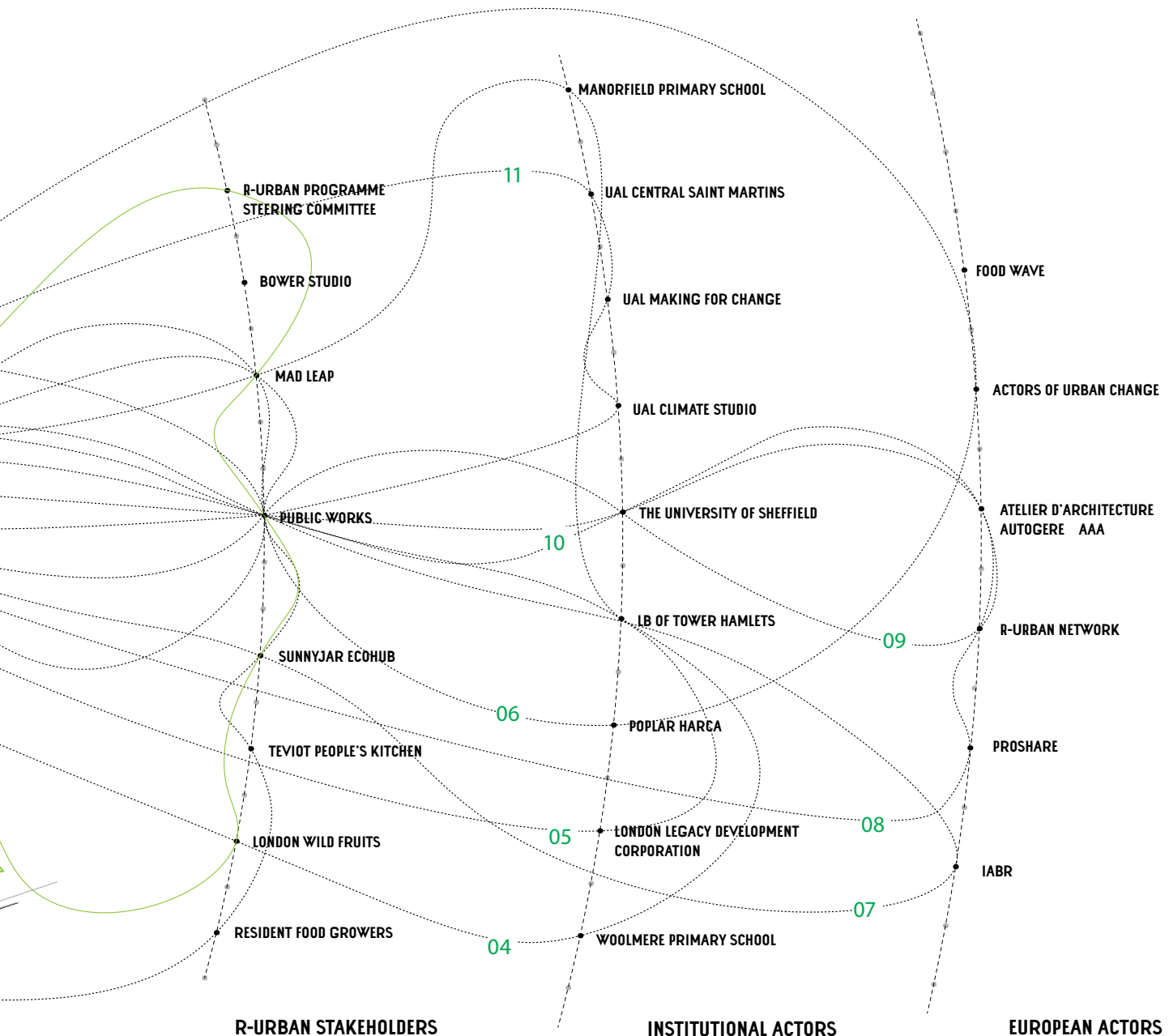
Relationscape Analysis

In comparing the 2021 baseline mapping it is clear to see the increase in project networks which have developed in the period. This is across all scales of actor, with a significant increase in institutional and local civic actors who are connected to the R-Urban hub.

Climate Companions now supports existing local networks (JustFACT and youth engagement) in embedding the R-Urban hub more closely to local initiatives and social justice movements. This is also reflected in the number of

stakeholder groups and enterprises who now use R-Urban as a base for their operations, with two new enterprises using the site as an office/workshop, and the Teviot People's Kitchen group using the site as their testing ground.

The PhD has also been an opportunity to strengthen institutional and European ties through research networks such as ProSHARE, The Phd and the Climate Studio project. This research and teaching often supports local groups embedded within the hub by extension.



R-Urban within the Neighbourhood 23-24

Figure 168 - Community green space bulb
planting Autumn 2023
Source: public works



Poplar Green Futures

What – GLA funding to develop Climate Resilient green spaces on Poplar HARCA estates. The commission involved auditing all existing open green spaces, and co-designing landscape designs to make these spaces more climate resilient and increase local biodiversity.

When – October 2023 - October 2024

Project Team – Poplar HARCA - Client
Farrar Huxley - Landscape Architect
R-Urban Poplar - Engagement
Doodling Around - Signage and Illustration
Resident Steering Committee

R-Urban Role – The commission focused on bringing the project expertise around engaging diverse audiences about green spaces in support of a co-design process with residents. This was developed in three stages:

1. Engagement in Climate Resilient Principles, which took place in 4 events which explored: community-led food growing, wild foods and foraging, case study visit to Hilldrop Farm to see habitat creation and a community planting day.
2. Two Open Workshops for Residents at local community centres, R-Urban members helped facilitate a resident voice and co-design session
3. Setting up the steering committee of local residents who input in to the green space design by Farrar Huxley.



Figure 169 - GGE Field Trip to Hilldrop Farm
Source: public works

AIM:
Transform green
space management
and design
along principles
of resilience and
increased biodiversity

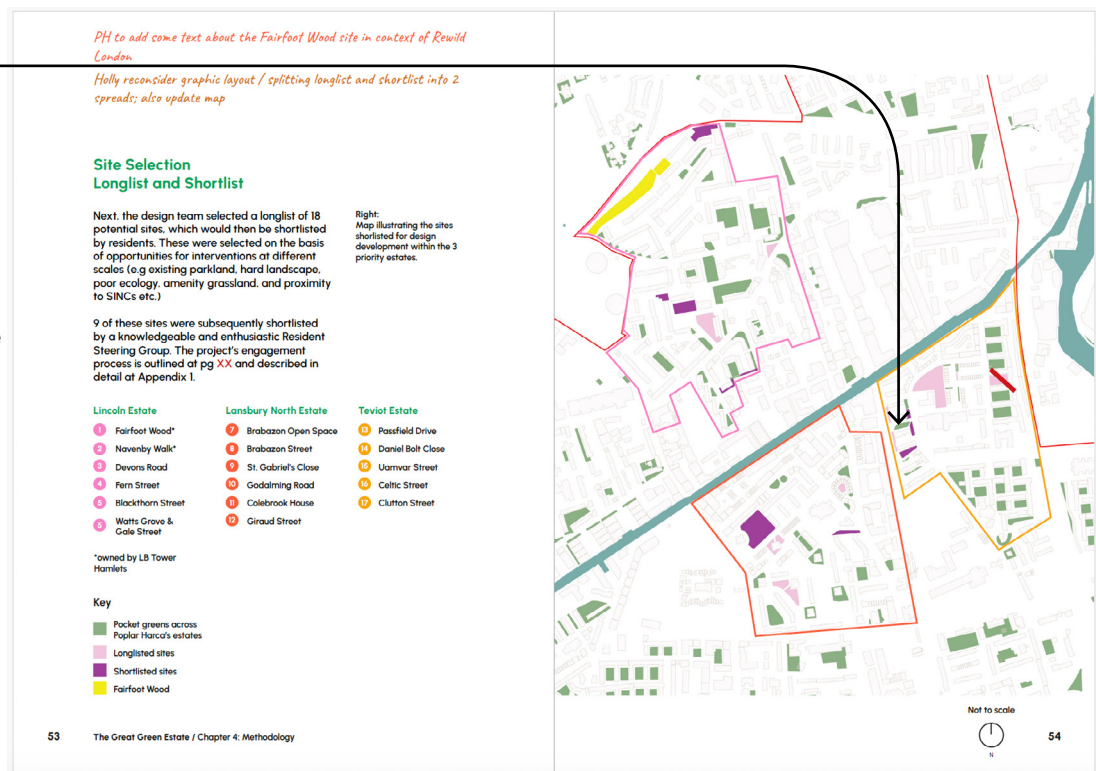
Outcomes

- ☉ Outline design of 9 neighbourhood spaces to make existing green spaces more climate resilient. Focussing on primarily low maintenance and low-impact schemes
- ☉ Funding for three of these sites in partnership with Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park
- ☉ Resident steering committee with greater understanding and capacity to respond to local challenges.
- ☉ Shifting understanding towards Resilience to wider network of institutional stakeholders.



Figure 170 - Co-designing local food production at R-Urban Poplar
Source: public works

R-Urban members joined steering committee and helped guide the process towards sites connected or close to the hub within the Teviot.



Three pocket greens on Uamvar Street are identified as high risk and focus of redesign. R-Urban members involved in co-design element.

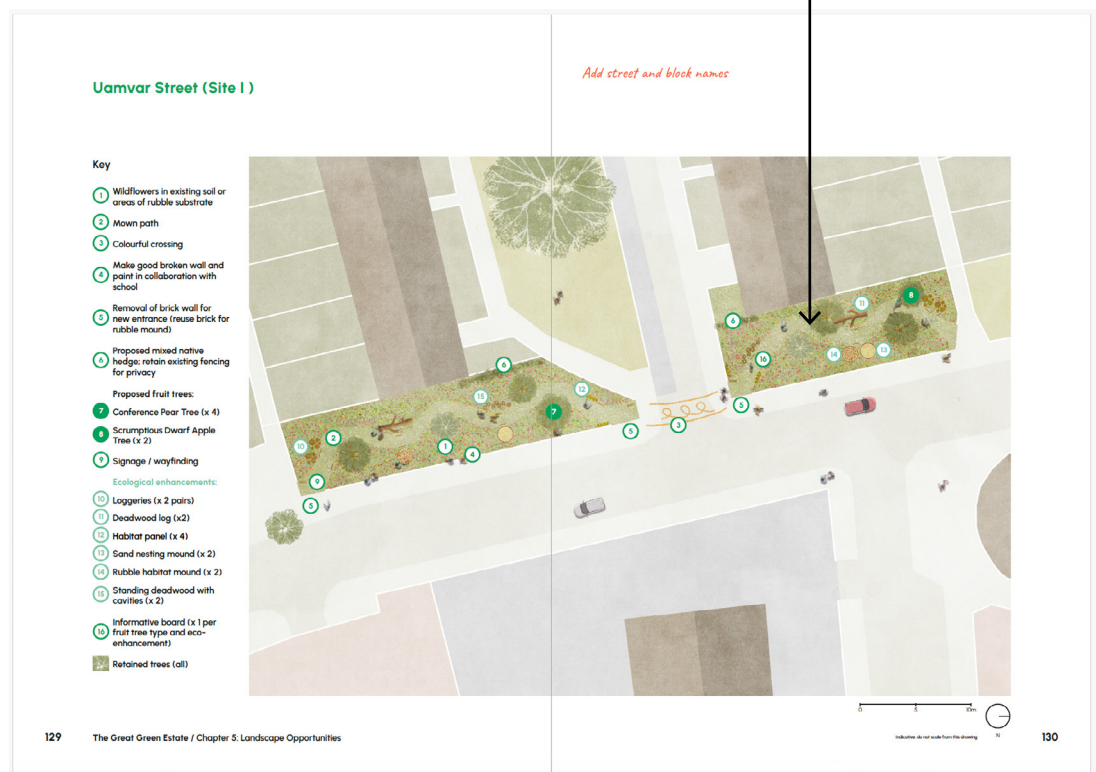


Figure 171 - Analysis of GGE report (accessible freely online), highlighting R-Urban stakeholder engagement in green space design
 Source: public works

International Architecture Bienalle Rotterdam

What – R-Urban and public works were invited by the curators of the 2024 Bienale to create an exhibition which engaged with the diverse relational economy of the R-Urban Poplar hub as part of their exhibition titled: 'Nature of Hope'.

When – Exhibition ran from June-October 2024 at the Museum Nieuwe Instituut: For Architecture, Design and Digital Culture

Project Team

- ☉ Andrew Belfield public works and R-Urban (Design)
- ☉ Andreas Lang - public works (Design)
- ☉ Rhianon Morgan Hatch - public works (Design)
- ☉ Maud Barrett - SunnyJar (Production)

Exhibition Description

"'Give and Gain: Relational Economies of Care'. The installation gives insight into the exchange mechanisms, relations and materials which sustain R-Urban beyond the monetary economy. We give by sharing resources, space, time, and knowledge with others. When diverse economies thrive in cities, we all have something to gain by working collectively towards future relationships with our neighbourhoods and the planet."

The tablecloth installation mirrors the beating heart of R-Urban Poplar, the communal dining space. The tablecloth and setting charts the evolution of R-Urban in London (2012-2024). The mappings, drawings and objects on display all have value in our relational economy of care"

Outcomes

- ☉ Exhibition helping to raise profile of R-Urban and work done on promoting relational and diverse common economies in cities.
- ☉ Exhibition features in 'ARCH+ The Business of Architecture' issue, with focus on Nature of Hope exhibition.
- ☉ Strengthened European ties with co-authored paper for Dimensions journal (Forthcoming)

AIM:

Raise awareness
of R-Urban Poplar
and expand
understanding
of how relational
economies can sustain
urban commons

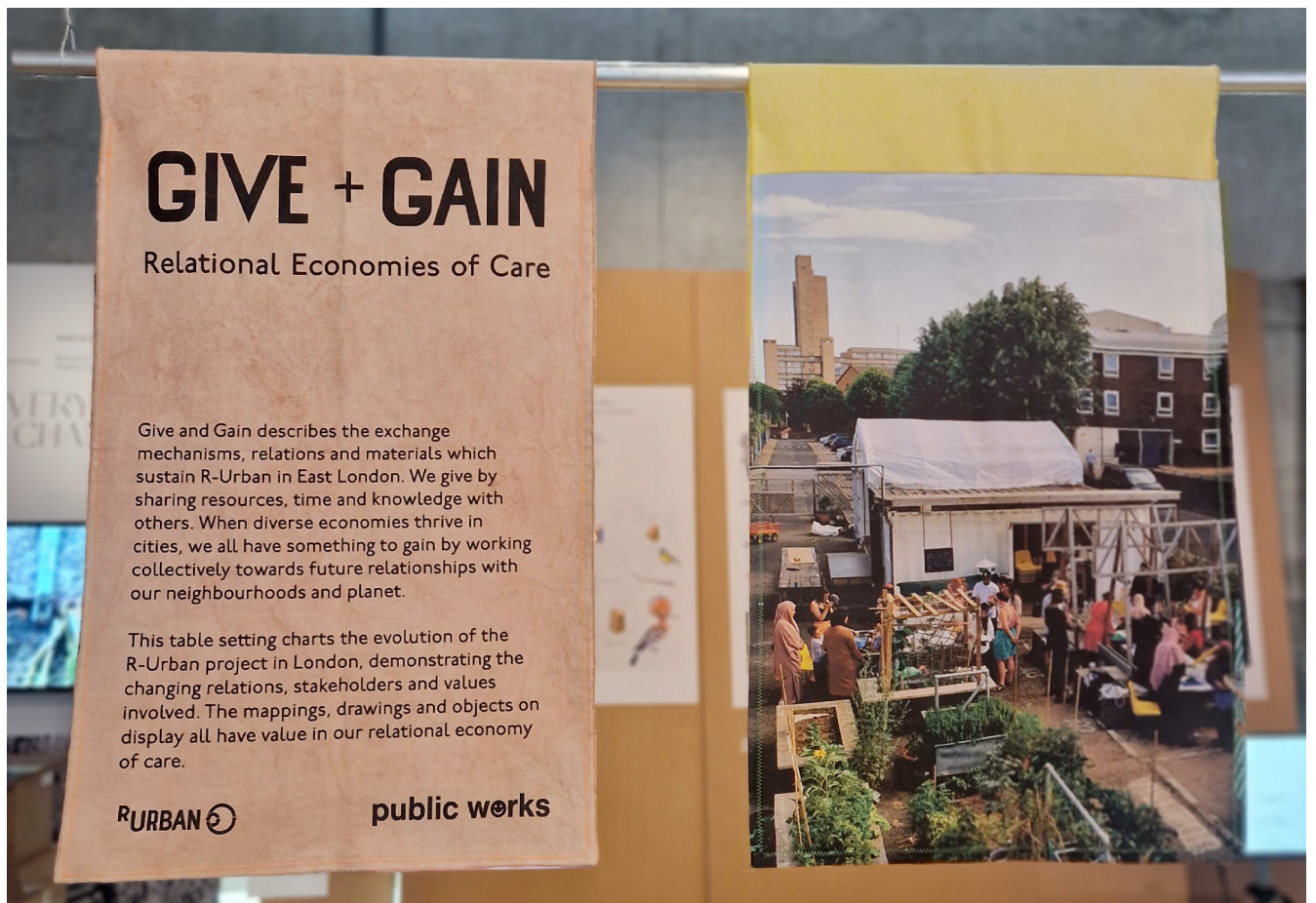


Figure 172 - Give and Gain exhibition banners

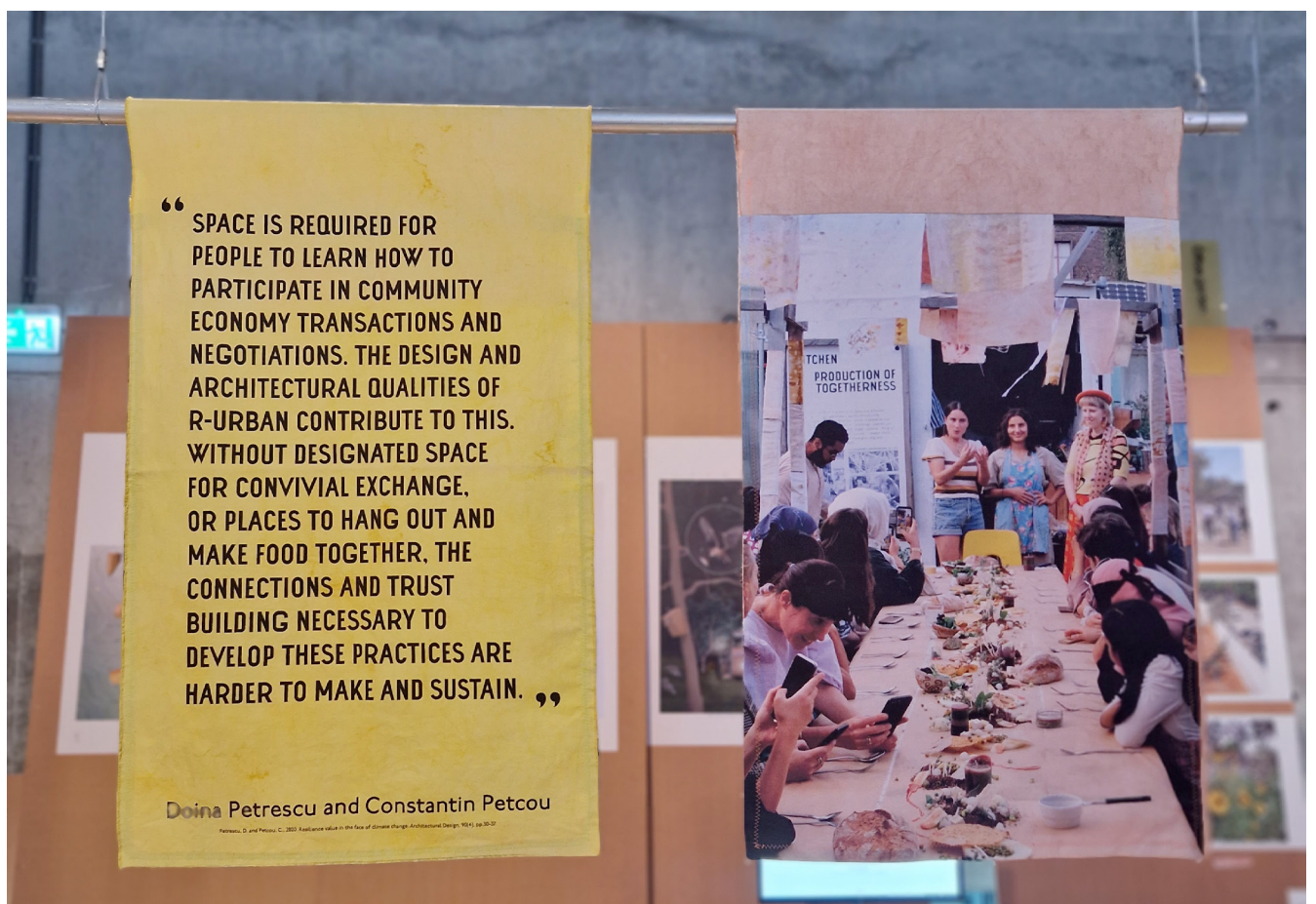


Figure 173 - Give and Gain exhibition banners 2

"How do you describe all the complexity of a relational architecture ... well you can only try. All the objects and finer details have value to R-Urban Poplar and the exhibition attempts to reflect this.

The Jar of Spring Pickle made from carrots, radishes and kale grown on site and preserved by the new cooperative of cooks, gardeners and mycologists 'The Teviot People's Kitchen' which is kindly funded by Wen's JustFACT.

The Mushrooms and compost are produced on site as part of our long-standing collaboration

with MAD LEAP and their mission to make our food system more circular.

The banners are, beautifully naturally dyed and stitched by SunnyJar who deliver our bi-weekly repairs and low-impact living workshops.

R-Urban Poplar is a collective vision for a more resilient, resourceful and hopeful future. It's a project of co-authorship, far beyond public works and we're thankful to share this project with others."

Exhibition Text, Source: public works



Figure 174 - R-Urban dried mushrooms in the relational economy of the site



Figure 175 - R-Urban compost, making new local economies from waste



Figure 176 - Table cloth details showing hub infrastructures

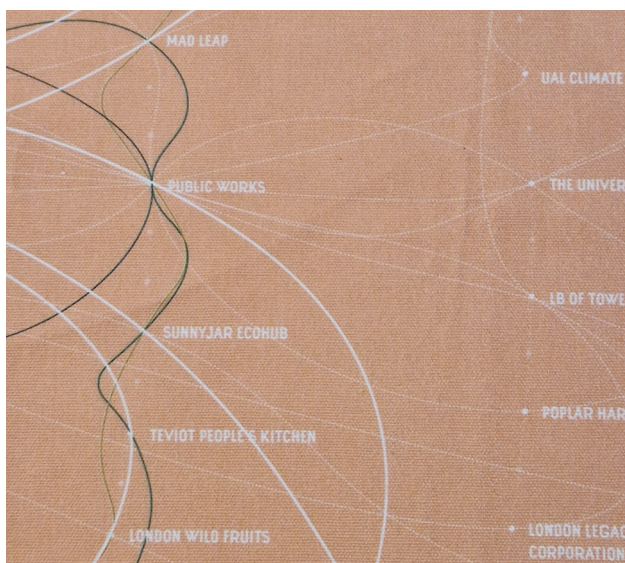


Figure 177 - Relational mapping of site and institutional stakeholders



Figure 178 - Booklet and zines which describe the multiple ecologies of R-Urban Poplar



Figure 179 - Situating the Poplar hub within the histories of R-Urban in Paris and Hackney Wick

Part 03

Extending Theories and Practices

5.0 Learning

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter analyses the modes and practices of learning within the two trial pedagogies (Climate Companions 2022 and 2023). It first categorises (table 01) the workshops into three main conceptual areas: learning by doing, learning from place, and learning through togetherness. Each of these is unpacked through interviewee accounts, reflections and analysis of the portfolio. The chapter primarily addresses **RQ2: Which learning methods enable transformative civic learning? And what are their distinct characteristics?**

5.2 Modes of Learning during Climate Companions (CC)

During the two CC programmes (2022 and 2023), the R-Urban community ran 32 workshops/sessions, reaching over 250 different participants. They were scheduled as a ‘festival of learning’ in recognition of their intensity during limited periods of time (September 2022 and June/July 2023). Multiple sessions were scheduled in a day, often with one workshop blurring into another, with slack space for conversations and hanging out together on site. Attendance was varied, with some participants (particularly the co-design group and R-Urban members) attending many sessions, whilst other newcomers came as ‘one-off’ participants.¹

CC sat outside the existing event and workshop programming at R-Urban, building upon what was already in place but with a renewed focus on climate change and neighbourhood action. In both 2022 and 2023 it supported R-Urban in ‘opening up’ to new facilitators and workshop hosts², the pedagogy becoming a platform to build new alliances and networks with groups. It was also a space in which to

¹ The following chapter and discussion reviews the experiences of participants who took part in multiple sessions as these were the primary beneficiaries. Whilst all sessions were publicly open and allowed drop-in and out participation, the analysis focuses on those learners who were more fully engaged in the pedagogic process.

² R-Urban members prefer to use the term ‘hosts’ rather than ‘teachers’ as its more relaxed term and less loaded with institutional baggage.

try something new (even if it meant failure), which enabled a variety of ‘alternative’ learning approaches to be tested. In Chapter 2, I discussed civic pedagogies’ use of ‘transversal methods’ (Tan, 2021) to overcome hierarchy and develop criticality; the methods documented within the portfolio are testament to this approach and provide a counterpoint to institutional learning frameworks.

This chapter focuses on situated learning in collective settings (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and their epistemological positioning by embracing situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988). Unlike previous R-Urban sessions which looked inwardly within the hub, some workshops reached out into the neighbourhood, building on scholarship from within urban education and radical geography (Gruenewald, 2003; Mcfarlane, 2011). These combined learning approaches, often linked to embodied learning and our experiences of the senses, highlight the role of active bodies in cognition (Gustafson, 1999; Drew, 2014). This chapter is an attempt to contribute to this scholarship, to extend theories within these fields and provide insights for future pedagogies and spatial practitioners.

To help capture the breadth of learning content, this analytical table 01 (Figure 180) categorises the individual workshops into three main modes of learning: *by doing, from place and through togetherness*. It also summarises the knowledge content and relevant theories which can be further explored in the subsequent findings and discussion.

Climate Companions Workshops	Mode of Learning	Knowledge Content	Theories
CC2022 - Eco-Build (5 x workshops) - Colouring the Communal Tablecloth - Adorning the Communal Tablecloth - Seed Harvesting Guerilla Gardening - Plastic Free Poplar CC2023 - Natural Skincare - Natural Cleaning - Fermented Foods - Herb Box Making - Waste Milk? Cheese and Butters - Mushroom Mysteries - Herbs and Health - Natural Dyes and Clothing Repairs	Learning by doing - Hands-on but discursive - Learning through failure/ignorance - Learning through senses	Life Skills Low-impact living (skills, tips, know-how) Ecological crafts	Situating Learning Situating Knowledges Embodied Knowledge Embodied Learning Tacit Knowledge
CC2022 - Noticing the Neighbourhood - Wild Poplar: Foraging and Green Spaces Walk - Mossy Walk, Mossy Talk - Soil Secrets - Seed Harvesting and Guerilla Gardening CC2023 - Poplar Green Spaces Walk - Bug Hunt - Bee Habitats - Limehouse Cut Canoe - Bat Walk	Learning from Place - Urban Exploration - Site Surveying / Observing	Urban and Natural Landscapes Understanding the Neighbourhood/City More-than-human perspectives	Embodied Learning Situating Knowledges More-than-human Ecological thinking
CC2022 - Noticing the Neighbourhood - Mossy Walk, Mossy Talk - Companions Digest: A collective Feast CC2023 - Bengali Pickles and Feast - Bat Walk - Potluck Feast	Learning through Togetherness - Discursive events - Performativity - Collective Learning	Community of Practice Climate and Biodiversity Crisis Food Cultures Subjective Experience	Embodied Learning Solidarity Relational Networks

Figure 180 - Table 01: Modes of Learning, Knowledge, and Theory during Climate Companions 2022 and 2023

5.3 Mode 1 - Learning by Doing

People don't want to be watching you do the thing. They want to be doing it, they want to be active.

5.3.1 Hands-on Skill Based Learning

Over half the workshops continued in the existing formats practised at R-Urban, focusing on learning and sharing new skills which support lower-impact living in cities and everyday life. These workshops had a wide range of content, from learning about natural and climate-friendly building construction techniques, to learning how to transform waste milk into cheese or how to propagate herbs and harvest seeds for the following years' garden projects. Workshops focused on the practice or skill associated with the topic, they were active and hands-on. Often led by a workshop facilitator (the host) who would demonstrate the 'how to' before participants would then try for themselves, or in many cases, the DIY element was a group activity, e.g., mixing mushroom buckets. Sessions had a stronger emphasis on practical skills rather than abstract discussion, as described here by a participant of multiple workshops in both programmes:

I like practical stuff, so I like hands-on. I think there's a lot of-- If you sat people there for an hour just talking, they'll get bored. Whereas if you have bits here, bits there, and then-- For me anyhow, I like a lot of practical stuff. Sometimes you have to sit down and learn -- like about the moss, learn about bits like the essentials. Obviously, you have to sit down a bit, but then it's always been a lot more practical than the theory [Learning at R-Urban].

These workshops were primarily guided by self-taught experts in their individual fields of interest. Self-teaching was a common thread shared by the hosts, who themselves had first acquired and developed their topic knowledge through self-directed learning and following passions. An example of this was the 'moss expert' who led the local moss walk and talk, an architect following a passion for the natural world and its intersection with the city:

Participant: Are you a microbiologist?

Host: No, I'm an architect, I'm interested in how we think about air and air quality ... and air as a material in the city, I kind of came to this with no biological knowledge and I've gradually gathered the facts.

Audio Recording from CC22 Filming

Another example would be the foraging expert, who has accrued twenty-plus years of deeply situated knowledge around wild foods through years of everyday life. In this case, and for many others, expertise was rooted in the embodied understanding of practice, often first becoming a way of life and then becoming the work of the session host sharing the knowledge with others.

Some hosts, however, had minimal expertise (in the workshop content) but were simply facilitating a process of joint inquiry and learning by doing together. The Eco-build sessions were an example of this, a collective experiment and prototyping of a natural build process with no designated lead. This could be considered as learning from a position of 'ignorance', learning by experiencing, by failing and repeating in a collective setting. This dialogue between two first-time R-Urban participants during CC22 summarises the creative process of learning on the job or by doing for the first time

Participant 1: It's all part of the creative process. [Laughter]

Participant 2: We make it up as we go along [Laughter] ... And then later it's this fantastic effect... It's like "ye we planned this from the beginning [Laughter]"

Participant 1: Yeah absolutely ... What happened there? "Oh we wanted it to be like this"...

Audio Recording from CC22 Filming

In most cases participants motivations for joining the programme were to learn new skills or acquire knowledge which would support them in living a lower-impact lifestyle. There is a clear immediacy to skills-based learning (by doing), which has wide appeal due to its applicability in everyday life and the directness of intuition.

Learners embraced the hands-on nature of the pedagogy, guided by expert hands, but very much by doing and experienced through the body. Sessions in which learners developed the ‘know-how’ to make more sustainable choices within the home were commonplace e.g. learning to sew (to repair clothing), learning how to make cheese (to reduce waste food) etc. These are ‘small acts’ of personal and individual change which require a specific knowledge or in cases, an ‘un-learning’ of harmful practices. The intention of highlighting this form of everyday learning is not in placing the burden for change on the individual³, but to see this form of learning as part of a wider political awakening towards climate and societal transitions.

5.3.2 ‘Doing’ Collectively

The workshops highlight the collective dimension of learning by doing. Learning can be a social process through ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ in a CoP (Lave and Wenger, 1991). These pedagogies are further evidence of this in non-institutional settings. With skills-based learning, it is important to first observe someone else and then act in small groups; in many cases, the workshops were about demystifying processes, which seem complex when self-teaching in isolation. One workshop attendee and co-design group member shared their reflection on how this collective setting aided their learning process:

I think there's definitely an element of doing it in a group, and then maybe also seeing first. I think it was the natural cleaning products [workshop] where, I don't remember anymore... I think we put little things together, and you only had to use a certain quantity, otherwise it didn't work. Then some people did a mistake, and it was too much. Then you see like, "Oh, it's not the end of the world." I think that helps a lot, because doing that at home, I think it _____ could discourage quite quickly. It's also, it's just that, and maybe that's just

³ All too often the burden of ‘change’ in climate transition is placed on the individual rather than tackling systemic change through policy. Whilst I acknowledge that the skills-based learning demonstrated here could be framed as ‘behaviour change’ for the individual, I think this form of empowering learning has transformative potential beyond the individual.

me personally, that threshold ... Here [R-Urban] at least you have the space. Everything is there. You just do it. Then at least that initial hurdle is taken. I think that makes a big difference. Even from just watching all these YouTube videos without any action ever, at least in my case, to being here and doing it and seeing, "Oh, it's actually not that difficult."

In some cases, skills-based learning was a secondary product of the workshop, e.g. learning to use power tools correctly during the Eco-Build sessions. In a similar vein to the previous example, these are life-skills, which often seem challenging to overcome in isolation, but with simple guidance, learners can pick up the basics. This simple learning act can be an empowering one for participants, overcoming perceived hurdles, demystifying practices and nurturing everyday skills, as described by a member of the co-design group:

Coming to the Eco-Build, not knowing very much about it at all, and then even learning to use the drill. It was like, "Oh, okay" Not that I plan to use the drill, but it's good, "and it doesn't look scary anymore because as before it's like, it's a huge thing, it's heavy and you don't know what's what, but now it's like, "Oh, okay, that's it? So simple" [laughter] Yes.

By learning (by-doing) in collective settings, the pedagogic dynamic and content are adapted by the group. Whilst much of the knowledge shared in these sessions is accessible online or via self-help tutorials, it is learning together which increases the potential of such civic learning. The collective setting helps to overcome barriers to knowledge, it creates a discursive space in which learners can share with one and other, build relations and shared complex understandings of multiple converging crises. That feeling of 'not doing it on your own' or being part of a bigger project is significant for both making these skills and lifestyles accessible and part of political project of transformation.

5.3.3 Reconnecting by (Doing)

I think you guys [R-Urban] are like, jogging people's memory because like I said, this community, the Bangladeshi community, we are resourceful anyway. Back home, you wouldn't waste. Back home, you'd make something out of something. That's what we are like, but we've forgotten, I feel like you're reminding people. I felt like people were getting that spark of-- We are like, "This is what we do anyway, but we've just forgotten."⁴

The previous section highlighted the hands-on, learning by doing approach, which is part of a broader embodied approach to 'learning with the body', in which the body is a 'para-theoretical device' connected with learners' everyday experiences (Petrescu, 2024). Drew (2014) described embodied learning as a 'see-feel-learn' process, bringing together our senses, touch, smell, and taste into the process of sense-making. In the same way that craftspeople learn through the hands, through tacit knowledge formed through years of repetition, where craft is the mastery of their process. In our case, mastery was never the objective as all sessions were entry-level. However, it does highlight the embodied dimension of these pedagogies.

Many workshops involved the hands-on learning of skills associated with ecological crafts (natural dyes, print making) and artisan food skills such as fermentation and preserve making. In these cases, we are often reconnecting to (or re-learning) skills which are perhaps seen as 'ancient' or forgotten, skills which were familiar to previous generations when resources were scarce. In these workshops, learning was framed within a criticality towards existing harmful everyday practices, e.g. the impact of textile waste in the fast fashion industry or how much food we waste as a society. The workshops were revisiting these historic practices in the spirit of un-learning negative habits, whilst reconnecting with ecologically and lower impact living practices (partially associated with former generations). This was always embodied, through the senses, by tasting, by touching, by doing.

⁴ Transcript taken from a workshop attendee in CC22 who comes to R-Urban as a home schooling environment for two young children.

Workshops also became a space in which to share situated knowledges and skills learnt within the home. Examples of this involved the seed harvesting workshop, in which the host shared tips and skills learnt from her grandmother, or pickle making, by sharing preservation recipes passed down by many generations in Bangladesh. The workshop format valorises this knowledge, sharing it with others, creating an engaged audience and framing its relevance to wider sustainable lifestyles. One member of the co-design group and workshop host (CC23) reflected on a desire to share more from her family's heritage and develop learning formats to disseminate this situated knowledge:

I'd love to be a host again. The pickles I've made so far have worked really well, and I'd love to learn a few more different things from my mum and then try some of those things out, but I think it takes a little bit more time. For example, the sun drying and things like that, you need the perfect weather for it. My mum's come up with techniques like she's got a boiler room and she'll put them in there and it just dries up in there. I think what would be really good is maybe having a booklet of all the different things that people can try at home, maybe videos, uploading them on Instagram.

Although this first mode of learning has focussed on the hands-on nature of the learning it was not say that sessions were not discursive. Part of the design-facilitation role (see Chapter 7) was to bring a critical framing around climate to workshop sessions. The flexibility of the learning format was conducive to deeper discussions, which took place in parallel with hands-on doing. A strength to this approach is in making learners feel comfortable by occupying them with a skill or craft. Discussions during this active workshop component turned towards larger concerns e.g., species loss, planetary climate change or deeper questioning of localised justice issues.

5.3.4 Situated and Embodied Doing: Learning, Un-learning and Re-learning

A commonality shared by 'learning by doing' was their situated and embodied character. They were situated through epistemology by sharing and valorising knowledge of experience, tacit knowledge and knowledge shared from familial generations and cultures. Learning was connected to the body: knowledge is felt, experienced, and sensed first, then reflected upon or brought into deeper understanding and meaning through collective sense-making. This approach is consistent with the literature review, reflecting the critical approach shared by many diverse radical pedagogies (critical, feminist). It is an approach to learning which exists otherwise to institutional teaching methods or in formalised training. Learning in civic settings is not subject to course requirements and assessments and is, therefore, freer in its applicability and aim.

Across both CC programmes, certain moments focused on practices of un-learning and re-learning. By un-learning, I speak towards the 'un-learning' of certain harmful life choices, e.g. being aware of the impact of mass consumerism in the fashion and beauty industry. Secondly, in 'un-learning' extractive practices of knowledge production by focusing on collective knowledge production and creating knowledge in dialogue between participants. In connection to un-learning is what I'm terming 're-learning', in recognition that in most cases the 'alternative' to harmful practices was often found in revisiting or 'reminding us' of forgotten ways of being. In many ways, the alternative is found by looking to the past, to history, and cultures of practice. These practices often have the potential to live more harmoniously with the planet and speak to a wider degrowth agenda which embraces our planetary ceiling, avoiding the pitfalls of climate techno-fixes and fully embracing a lower-impact form of life.

The second dimension of 'un' and 're'-learning is through the valorisation of situated knowledges. CC foregrounded overlooked and undervalued knowledge of lived experience over reason or logic-centred knowledge. In some cases, workshop

hosts shared years of knowledge acquired through practice and everyday life (e.g. foraging or horticultural expertise). This knowledge is rooted in personal passions and curiosity and the CP created a platform in which new hosts could share this knowledge with others. In most cases, hosts did not present themselves as all-encompassing knower of the subject but instead welcomed contributions from all participants as part of a wider collective sense-making. In certain moments, the pedagogy was a way to reconnect with lost or forgotten practices linked to shared cultures and family.

In summary, CP ensure a plurality of knowledge in addressing climate and urban justice. They change attitudes and perspectives, seeing the complexity of our existing condition and revealing these contradictions in everyday life. In this example, criticality is formed through the practice of situated and embodied learning methods. These methods help to alter perspectives and subjectivities within learners. It is an active and hands-on form of learning, which is enabled through action.

5.4 Mode 2 - Learning from Place

I learnt to look more closely at my surroundings, to forage wild food and use the produce which we gathered.

The second mode of learning is from place. Urban educators and radical geographers have long advocated for the power of learning through neighbourhood exploration (Dobson, 2006). Urban Studies Centres, across Britain in the 1970/80s, conceived the city as a playground for child centred engagement with urban planning (Ward, 1973, Perez Martinez, 2019). Colin Mcfarlane (2011) articulated the city as a learning assemblage by developing criticality from experiential learning and recognising its transformative potential for citizens. It was in this spirit that one-third of the CC workshops engaged; by exploring and learning from place.

5.4.1 Walking and Sensing the Neighbourhood

Explorative neighbourhood walks became a core approach to ground the pedagogies within the local context. Each walk was curated around a particular theme e.g. wild foods, sound, natural habitats etc. In all cases, they were facilitated by an expert host, who brought a deep understanding and knowledge of the topic to the walk which was essential. These experts had little or no prior knowledge of the physical geography, walking routes were determined by local participants, who had a deeply situated understanding of the neighbourhood. This combination of knowledges (highly specific and highly contextual) created a productive lens through which learners gained new perspectives on the familiar, as described in this written survey response:

I learnt about some local community gardens, and it was great to be able to participate by showing others round the Greening Brownfield Garden, where I volunteer. I also appreciated looking closely at the environment and things growing in the local area. It's so easy to ignore these things during normal daily life. It was great joining in the bat walk and discovering that there are lots of bats close to where I live, and hearing them on the detectors.

Each explorative walk provided different insights and perspectives, many of which linked to bigger themes; for example: studying moss habitats, participants became conscious of levels of air pollution⁵ and urban mobility, or by using bat detectors, they were able to tune into populations of pipistrelle bats and could observe the habitats which supported most insects. In most cases, themes linked back to wider understandings of climate and urban dynamics such as mobility, biodiversity, access to land etc. Walking routes were entirely within a ten-minute walking radius of R-Urban demonstrating an intensity of focus on a hyper-local neighbourhood. Walking routes were freely selected, often rambling, but in all cases, were bounded by major urban infrastructures (Canal to the North, A12 motorway to the East,

⁵ During the workshop we learnt that Moss species are sensitive to levels of air pollution and grow more successfully in places with high particulate matter (PM2.5 and 10). By observing where moss species were most prevalent you could also deduce where pollution was highest.

Docklands Light Railway to the West). These workshops had the potential to change the way in which learners perceived and understood their neighbourhoods in the spirit of what Gruenewald (2003) called the critical understanding of place.

Learning from place requires processes grounded in the bodily senses. In some cases, walks prioritised one sense, for example by zooming in and focussing only on sound. This was a powerful experience and again provided learners with new insights, for example, greater awareness of sound pollution from motor vehicles in particular neighbourhood pockets, and how this experience links to air quality. In these workshops, it was important to have a discursive space where participants could share with one another and discuss their personal observations and reflections of the neighbourhood. Walks were equally effective as networking devices, discovering new spaces, linking up with existing groups and projects, as one member of the CC23 co-design group described it:

With that moss walk, where we walked around a little bit, the bat walk as well, I think I discovered new areas, where I thought, "Oh, that is actually interesting." Then that one workshop across the road, that fashion hub [Poplar works] it was great to experience these places.

One significant outcome for learners who lived within the neighbourhood of Poplar was in how these walks shifted perspectives, ingraining new 'habits' in their everyday. For example, a member of the co-design group described further interactions with foraging with friends and family:

*I was pointing out to some of my friends when we were walking around the area as well, I was like, oh, you can eat this actually. – "Are you sure?" I was like, yes, I've been to a foraging walk. -- "What's a foraging walk?" It created a lot more conversation...
... and Yusra [daughter] was able to pick it up. "Mum, I remember people were eating these flowers." It was really nice, that's why I brought her along, so she would pick up a little bit. It's just starting from somewhere.*

I would argue that this ‘starting from somewhere’ is a first step towards adopting new habits and perceptions of what the city should be. One participant linked their new understanding of air pollution through the moss walk to using the car less and changing walking routes. In these cases, learners adapted personal habits based on a new reading of the neighbourhood and their everyday life.

5.4.2 Learning from the Neighbourhood Micro-climate

What sets CC apart from traditional institutional learning models is the simple fact that we learned in the open air, subject to the realities of the existing micro-climate. When learning in the open air (both at R-Urban and in the neighbourhood), your body becomes the first connection to the specific micro-climate of the neighbourhood. CC22 took place in September, following one of the hottest summers on record in the Southeast of England. The summer (July) of 2022 was punctuated by wild grass fires destroying homes just a few kilometres to the East of Poplar in Wennington. By learning in the open air, within the neighbourhood, learners were more directly connected to sensory experiences of climate, sheltering under trees during torrential downpours (Moss Walk), desperately finding shade during the heat of the day (Bee Habitats, Poplar Green Spaces Walk). These were all examples of the neighbourhood micro-climate shaping learners’ pedagogic experience.

Learning outdoors, from place, brought learners closer to the core subject by discussing the neighbourhood effects of our rapidly changing climate. Unlike indoor classroom-based learning, the programmes were made and shaped by what was found. When discussing the nature of R-Urban as an open-air learning environment hub members⁶ reflected on how the lack of comfort mobilises learners physically:

Responder 4: Our classroom is the exterior space. I think it forces us to actually do more interesting work.

⁶ The focus group involved representatives from the four main civic associations who steward the R-Urban hub, four participants were women and one man, all under the age of 50 and all regularly facilitate and host workshops at R-Urban, including during CC.

Responder 3: I agree.

Responder 4: It forces people to be in the elements and not get comfortable and not sit plonking down cells in a chair and not move off. It mobilizes people.

Responder 3: It definitely makes it unique, different.

Responder 4: It might be uncomfortable but I think that's important. I feel like that's part of it.

Learning is partially realised through the environment and setting of the pedagogy; it draws learners closer to the topics discussed and creates an environment that helps to ground the content in a lived reality. When given a way of 'reading' the city through expert guidance (foragers, multi-species specialists, etc.), it can begin to tell us more about a place that is conceived in our day-to-day life. For example, the foraging walk explores specific plants and fruits, but this tells us more than this; it discusses horticulture (why was it planted?), green space management, urban design (defensive planting, deterring certain behaviours), climate (why certain plants thrive in our micro-climate) and much more, as outlined in this audio extract and auto-ethnographic journal reflection from the 2023 Foraging Walk:

*What kind of things are in season now? Yes, more broadly flowers...
... that's a really excellent start... does anyone know what this is?
... They're really spiky and don't look edible at all, but they're really good. Try and find a blue one, they're called mahonia or another name is Oregon grape. If you do some processing and separate the seed from the fruit you get an excellent, really lovely juice.*

Audio Transcript CC 23 Film

*We walk 5m out the gate before Ru stops us to explore the first plant. He asks given the time of year, what food crops can we expect to find ... Flowers, and early summer fruits are typical for June. Conversely, compared to gardening, wild salad greens are not yet in season. We stop and huddle behind some parked cars with Ru pointing to the blue berries of a thorny looking bush.
"Does anyone know what this is?" [no response]
"It's Mahonia, the berries are tasty, but the seeds are incredibly bitter."*

Ru then talks about how this is a unseen food crop, the plant is selected by urban designers for defensibility (thorny), to prevent people hiding in urban areas but few people eat the berries.

Auto-ethnographic journal entry

The neighbourhood creates a physicality to learning which helps to ground learners in the present, helping to develop more nuanced understandings of the topic. Another example of this nuance was through R-Urban's proximity to one of London's most heavily polluted roads (the A12) by an artist workshop facilitator during CC22:

The fact that you're next to the road [A12], I was like, "Oh, must be not good to have a garden here. Because it's humongous and it's ugly and polluted." Then I remember speaking to someone about it and we were just like, "Wow, we've been here the whole day and I haven't even heard the road." My nearness to the road was completely camouflaged by the loveliness of my experience in the space. The connections and the birds and the plants and just being outdoors. I find this really interesting.

This highlights an interesting spatial justice dimension to air quality in cities. The impact of poor air quality is hyper localised; different levels of pollution exposure are influenced by multiple factors, including the direction of prevailing winds, the abundance of green infrastructure and building configurations (as well as pollution sources). In the case of R-Urban Poplar, the site rather fortuitously sits in favour of many of these conditions, and air quality monitors indicate lower levels of air pollution compared to sites located to the West of the A12⁷. This is just one example of the complexity associated with understanding the impact of a rapidly changing climate on the neighbourhood⁸. It also relates to learners' specific condition, where they live, the routes they walk, the modes of transport they use and take. In

⁷ These levels of pollutants are still however high, and should clearly be reduced through lower dependency on private cars and increased public transport provision.

⁸ The intention is not to illustrate air pollution as an urban challenge not to be solved, but to rather illustrate the complexity of decision making for urban and citizen planning activists.

creates a personal relation to sometimes abstract 'climatic' phenomena, such as air quality. By grounding the learning process in the open-air, the micro-climate and spatial conditions of place became integral pedagogic framework. Learners' direct engagement with place was pivotal in shaping understandings of spatialised climate change phenomena (e.g. air quality, biodiversity loss, climate adaptation risks), it created an emotive response to sometimes abstract notions of crisis or emergency.

5.4.3 Exploring the Hidden 'Universe' Under Your Feet

Whilst place-based learning was primarily at the scale of the neighbourhood, exploration of the minute and microscopic were equally examples of 'learning from place'. In a series of workshops which focussed inwardly within the R-Urban hub, learning sought to gain new perspective by surveying and observing more-than-human life on site. Bug hunts, soil microbe surveys, and seed harvesting workshops were all examples of zooming in rather than out. These workshops like the urban exploration walks were about gaining new insights on what is usually overlooked, bringing to life site biodiversity and ecologies:

Participant: "This is about 7 billion microorganisms (one teaspoon of soil)?"

Host: "This is a whole universe" [Laughter]

Host: "It's very beautiful, you see some amazing colours and shapes [looking at soil under the microscope]"

Participant: Which one is this? Is this our [R-Urban] compost?"

Host: This is humanure compost. We're just looking at 40x, so 40 times magnified, you can see all sorts of cells, plant cells, ... the different kinds of brown are different humic and vulvic acids, which are more and more complex carbon chains which plants need to grow."

Film Audio Transcript CC22

This is a learning process which focuses on revealing the unseen beneath your feet by first observing what is actually there before discussing what that tells us about a place. For example, how increased microbial life in our humanure versus

a grassland soil sample was indicative of healthier soils, or recording the number of insect species within a 1m square quadrant in different site locations highlighted habitats conducive to increased biodiversity. The intention of these workshops is to help nurture a better understanding of natural habitats and life before discussing human interaction with these systems from an ecological perspective. I argue this helps to develop empathy within learners for the more-than-human, shifting ways of seeing the city as an anthropocentric entity to a more complex, nuanced, and entangled nature-culture ecology.

This entanglement and supporting learners to engage with it was often summarised as our 'connection to nature' by participants. When discussing the role of R-Urban within the neighbourhood, one R-Urban member and focus group participant described its purpose in these terms:

I feel, for me, growing up, you don't have-- in the city, I didn't have much green spaces or anywhere you could do growing or see things grow, beaches and all that sort of stuff. You had to travel out and we didn't have money to do traveling out. For me, this space is somewhere where not just people can gather as a community, but they have access to growing and plants and bugs and touching things and seeing lots of green, less concrete. Bringing the countryside, kind of, to them. That's what it is for me. I know there's a lot of children around here who won't-- their parents don't have-- You can't hop in the car and just go wherever or not having the train travel and stuff. This is probably as close to nature as they're going to get until they're older, so that's sort of it.

Learning in the open air is an opportunity to directly connect with nature, if at first glance, within a neighbourhood which wouldn't be recognised for its biodiversity. The more-than-human world of our streetscapes, parks, and gardens became integral to the learning experience, a register of the existing abundance and entanglement of human interaction with natural systems (e.g. managed habitats, re-wilding projects, pioneer species growing without human control). By learning in the outdoors, from the neighbourhood (place), an empathy and understanding was nurtured

in learners. In some cases, this was a first-time engagement with nature on their doorsteps, a small step towards understanding its complexity. Such examples can lead to ‘environmental empathy’, which is essential in creating subjectivities with the understanding of this complexity and begin to think how they could be transformed through civic action.

5.5 Mode 3 - Learning through Togetherness

I think it's a generosity. I think what we all have in common is that it's a kindness and a generosity and we want to be making space for people to learn, to share. Not just for us to be there and do our thing, but just creating a time for people to be happy, including ourselves.⁹

The third mode of learning centred on social relations by cultivating ‘Togetherness’. In social anthropology, the term is often synonymous with observations of community ‘belonging’, ‘closeness’ or ‘unity’ and the social structures which inhibit and enable it. In exploring togetherness in critical urban pedagogies Ortiz and Millan (2022) describe how it “catalyses place belonging and collective identity” through shared bodily connections, emotions, and relationality in space (p.840). This emergent concept, ‘togetherness’, was nurtured through the pedagogic methods in both programmes. This next section seeks to elaborate on these conditions by exploring the performativity of workshops and its role in supporting the production of togetherness.

5.5.2 Performing Togetherness

During the curation of the learning programmes there was an emphasis on supporting creative and transversal methods, encouraging workshop hosts to test or develop new approaches through the invitation. Examples of this can be seen

9 R-Urban member and focus group participant

within the portfolio e.g. 'Listening to the Neighbourhood' was inspired by Pauline Oliveros 'Deep Listening'¹⁰ (see Portfolio pages 172-173) or the 'Companions Digest' organised a discursive feast (see Portfolio pages 202-209). These approaches had a shared performativity, rooted in the embodied approach to learning.

Many of the neighbourhood walks naturally became moments of performance, often by engaging physically with the neighbourhood in ways which were otherwise or beyond the norm. The act of walking together (in some cases over 30 participants), occupying street corners, climbing apple trees, and moving through parks at dusk clutching bat detectors all create a sense of performance to the learning activity. These workshops are all embodied by engaging the senses but also through a collective body which moves through space. This collective body is important in creating commonality within the CoP, doing these activities together helps to overcome initial hesitations or embarrassment, and it contributes to a joyful atmosphere which is convivial for learning.

Beyond the neighbourhood walks, many of the collective meals nurtured elements of performance. These events were designed to build conversation and connections between participants with the feast becoming a setting or ritual to encourage discussion. In some cases, this was through collective preparation of food e.g. 30 people folding and frying samosa and pakora for the 'Bangla Feast', whilst simultaneously discussing Bengali crops grown within the garden. Another example was during the 'Companions Digest', in which the meal was designed around three moments of collective reflection and discussion. These 'discursive dinners' used food to tell a story of the CC programme, highlighting locally foraged produce, making hand-crafted table settings, and staging a feast in which dinners were asked to exchange with neighbours and explore topics related to climate and care.

These feasts take the everyday act of preparing (and eating) food and elevate it through the curation of shared activities and rituals. They were significant moments in helping to develop relations between participants, learners becoming companions

¹⁰ Pauline Oliveros (1999) in their own words, 'Deep Listening involves going below the surface of what is heard, expanding to the whole field of sound while finding focus. This is the way to connect with the acoustic environment, all that inhabits it, and all that there is.'

through the shared activity of ‘breaking bread’, as described by a co-design group participant and first-time workshop host at R-Urban:

It was great to meet a lot [of] different people on the estate who I wouldn't normally mix with and have person to person exchanges. The programme helped draw out specific conversations about different peoples culture and how and why we do things. Which I really think helped create a more genuine and deep conversation between people. It helps us understand the environment and the place, but also each other!

The role of the host in these feasts was really that of caretaker or giver, taking the time to develop the menu and setting for the meal. When participants are ‘cared for’ in this manner, it frees up other space for conversation and reflection within the group. It supports a convivial atmosphere, which is important in building relations and forming trusting bonds. It also helps to broker an understanding of different cultures by forming shared reflections on climate change at the scale of the neighbourhood, as described by a co-design group member and attendee of the CC programmes:

It's funny because the sustainability or climate topic is one, but I think the other piece, and I discussed it with one of the participants here as well, and that's not to be overlooked. It's also that breaking down barriers between groups in the community because the option to interact with, and even the ladies from Bangladesh who do all the gardening here, I wouldn't know where otherwise I would have a platform like this. It's been so interesting and insightful and there's so much to learn from them. Otherwise, you probably would live next to each other and always feel like, I don't know. I don't know. It's another culture and this and that, but it's such a nice way to break these barriers down and I think that's another massive element.

This role of performative methods in helping to nurture ‘togetherness’ is not to be underestimated within the pedagogy. It supports the formation of wider CoP (and concern for others and planet). It helps to reduce barriers between different communities and form stronger relations which can support the production of solidarities and alliances.

5.5.3 Companionships, Alliances, and Solidarities through 'Togetherness'

Learning was shaped by creativity, utilising performative moments to foster relationships, trust, and commonality among co-learners. By learning and acting together, there were several significant outcomes for the pedagogy which resonate at different scales.

Firstly, the design of the learning programmes sought to contribute to feelings of inclusivity and cohesion from their inception. The focus was to make a learning environment for all, from small children to elderly learners alike, an environment which was genuinely inclusive of abilities and cultural identities. In moments, the pedagogic content directly helped contribute to the sense of togetherness e.g., the discursive dinners, which reflected a sensitive and caring approach to learning, one in which the intention is also to build 'companionships'¹¹. Unlike institutional learning, these were collective pedagogies; learners were never in competition or seeking accreditation, it was for the most part, learning for the sake of it and learning how to be part of a CoP.

In many cases, the pedagogies helped to nurture what Tan (2021) describes as 'unusual alliances' between participants. 'Unusual' in the sense that these companionships or acquaintances were outside learners existing everyday connections e.g., queer Mycologists' learning in connection with devote Muslims. Modes of learning that promote togetherness helped in this case build relations and understanding between individuals, developing mutual respect, trust, and eventually companionships. These 'unusual alliances' are significant within civil society, helping to support wider networks at the scale of the neighbourhood.

CC had a secondary role in connecting R-Urban members to the local geography and its civic actors. The pedagogy became a performative way of visualising networks of civic and grassroots groups, seeing other spaces, being welcomed and hosted by other civic actors, and learning from their experiences. The green space walks were particularly significant moments of forming new relations between like-minded groups, all working at the scale of Poplar. Other sessions (e.g., Herb box

¹¹ The Etymology of 'Companion' is rooted in two parts in Latin, 'com' meaning 'together' and 'with' – and 'panis' meaning 'bread' – this was quite directly translated as 'one who brakes bread with another' (and something I was ignorant of until this write-up!)

making) used other local groups' resources and knowledge.

Beyond alliances, the pedagogies help to shape a shared solidarity between each hyper-local network. Solidarity can exist beyond immediate territories and work across scales as a 'transformative relation' when challenging injustices through political struggle (Featherstone, 2012). Locally, these relational networks coalesce around certain projects or causes as a form of togetherness between civic and grassroots groups. These local organisations are linked through climate justice movement within Tower Hamlets (the Just Food and Climate Transition) and other networks linked with climate and sustainable transition initiatives (Tower Hamlets Food Partnership). In both these examples, these Tower Hamlets specific networks are sustained and mobilised by a local charity, The Women's Environmental Network (Wen). Both networks are examples of the collective local voice when campaigning and advocating for local climate action. These relational networks also help to sustain groups, creating informal exchange networks where resources can be shared without monetary exchange. Although these networks exist beyond the pedagogy, the production of togetherness by physically networking and building alliances at the neighbourhood level (through the pedagogy) helps to strengthen solidarity between civic groups in Poplar.

Solidarities were also formed beyond the local, at a trans-national level through the programme e.g., expanding understanding of climate struggles in distant geographies. In this case, learning about Bangla food cultures (the growing and preparation of specific foods) was a small act in solidarity with widening understanding of the urgency of the climate crisis within Bangladesh¹². Discussions during the workshops helped develop a wider awareness of its precarity, and participants shared personal reflections on their own lived experience of extreme weather events or the impact on families 'back home'. I would argue that this modest gesture helps to develop a planetary and personal exploration of the impact of anthropocentric climate change. It supports the building of empathy with others and raises awareness which may have 'transformative potential' in wider calls for global justice.

¹² Bangladesh is one of the most 'at risk' countries due to man-made climate change, it is estimated that 32% of the Bengali population is directly affected by climate change

5.6 Chapter Conclusion

In discussing the ‘practices and methods of civic learning’ the chapter has highlighted the importance of situated and embodied neighbourhood pedagogies as the primary vehicle of knowledge co-creation. The three main modes of learning —by doing, through togetherness, and from place —were all demonstrations of an ‘alterity’ in pedagogic methods when compared with institutional settings, foregrounding experiences felt through the body and rooted in learners’ lived experiences. I would argue that these situated and embodied methods help learners to alter viewpoints by raising consciousness within the everyday, supporting the formation of new subjectivities. There are three main modes of learning which enable this:

Learning by doing has an immediacy and applicability that allows for the ‘un’ and ‘re’-learning of skills which can be quickly adopted by learners in domestic arenas, with family and friends. It is most effective in group settings; learning within a collective setting can demystify skills, and learners may then incorporate these new practices in everyday life. This was robustly evidenced through extensive post-evaluation accounts, film transcripts and auto-ethnographic reflections, and the thesis proposes ‘by-doing’ as the primary pedagogic method during CC.

Learning from place helps ground personal identities within wider neighbourhood contexts, shifting the viewpoint beyond the individual to more-than-human and civic concerns, as evidenced by interviewee reflections on daily routines. It speculates that this deep engagement with place can support the formation of environmental empathy in learners in response to the climate emergency and develop deeper ties and observations of the surrounding built and natural environments.

Learning through togetherness ultimately shapes the learning experience as part of a community of practice. By reflecting on the learning methods observed and learner accounts of the pedagogic atmosphere, I speculate that specific performative learning methods and practices (meals, feasts, collective walks) create the context in

which ‘togetherness’ flourishes. This emerges at the neighbourhood scale through ‘unusual alliances’ as extended relational networks of civic collaborators. These performative methods nurture solidarities through their reciprocal and dialogic nature, understanding through others’ eyes. They materialise through relational understandings of wider justice concerns and by striving towards equity (at both metropolitan and national levels).

These forms of situated knowledge(s) are, by their roots, partial, as their partiality and rooting within the self are integral to consciousness raising in liberatory pedagogies. This ‘situatedness’ extends beyond knowledge when considering the reach of the CC programme by being tied to one particular neighbourhood. Perhaps a limitation of this approach is in its scalability. The pedagogies were impactful for those who participated fully (attending the majority of sessions). However, the methods also evidenced that they limit their potential impact for one-off participants or those not deeply connected to the neighbourhood.

Despite this limitation, the pedagogic tools developed help support those deeply engaged by valorising knowledge of situated experience and tacit knowing. This valorisation happens within and from the collective group, the pedagogies giving it a platform to be shared. Learning within collective experiences, where knowledge is co-created and embodied through action, was integral to CC. In this case, CP were most effective when new knowledge could be applied directly in the everyday, by changing learner perspectives on their neighbourhood.

6.0 Spaces

6.1 Chapter Overview

Climate Companions (CC) was embedded within the R-Urban hub and the surrounding neighbourhood of Poplar. This next chapter focuses on how spatial and social infrastructures (of R-Urban) enabled and shaped the pedagogy. It aims to answer RQ2, specifically by answering ‘RQ2: Which spaces enable transformative civic learning? And what are their distinct characteristics? This question directly addresses the R-Urban hub as a defined learning environment, focusing on what social and spatial qualities enable civic pedagogies to thrive in this space.

The findings articulate how the R-Urban hub was a space of: ‘demonstration’, ‘openness and freedom’, and ‘care and inclusion’. Before discussing the role of spatially designed urban commons in civic learning and the value of informal spaces as inclusive urban learning forums.

6.2 Spaces of Civic Learning

In Chapter 2 (literature review), I outlined how civic pedagogies take place either at the edge of institutions through engaged research processes which value collective and diverse knowledge co-production e.g., living lab frameworks (Karvonen and van Heur, 2014; Bulkeley et al., 2019). Or beyond institutions, sitting outside them, within the realms of critical spatial practice, as spaces which attempt to re-think the possibility of what learning institutions and infrastructures might be e.g., Floating Berlin (Elarji and Michels, 2020; Ranzato and Brogini, 2024). In essence, CC was a blend of both approaches, utilising post-graduate research frameworks to set up an engaged learning process in support of an existing hub of institutional re-imagining (R-Urban Poplar).

The following section focuses on the specific character of R-Urban as a ‘threshold space’ (Stavrides, 2015) and ‘boundary commons’ (De Angelis, 2017), focusing on how the physical space and resources enabled the pedagogy. Space is also socially constructed. Therefore, discussion requires unpacking the governance systems,

values, and social groups of the place. Exploring this duality resonates with Colin Mcfarlane's (2011) conception of an 'urban learning forum' in describing the specific learning assemblage which enables 'learning through coordination' (p. 97). The following section analyses the typologies of spaces that enabled the programme, using participant interview transcripts, autoethnographic reflections, photography, and analytical architectural drawings. Aiming to articulate what defines a 'space of civic learning' and how such spaces sit alongside (and beyond) existing institutional learning arenas. Through the triangulation of these data sets, the chapter robustly demonstrates how urban commons are integral to civic learning, how their spatial and social informality and porosity shape the pedagogic process, which leads to the speculative findings on how this informality establishes more inclusive learning environments.

6.3 A Space of 'Demonstration'

Firstly, the R-Urban hub has a specific purpose around civic education, a specific form of learning environment which sits outside traditional teaching institutions. From the outset, the hub has been an evolving arrangement of functions, spaces, networks and programmes which collectively form the eco-civic hub. The hub has grown slowly and incrementally, in response to pockets of funding becoming available in different timeframes. This evolution of hub infrastructures (2017-2024) is documented within the 'Practice Portfolio' (Pages 122-135, 288-297). The hub is described on its website as '...a collection of prototype infrastructures which work towards developing resilient urban systems in Poplar' (public works / R-Urban, 2023). These 'prototype infrastructures' form the spatial and learning infrastructure of the hub, a space of experimentation, as prototypes aim to envision possible urban futures that are more resilient and have a lower socio-environmental impact. One example of this is the on-site greywater treatment bed, which filters kitchen wastewater through a series of raised reed filtration beds before being used to water wildlife habitats on

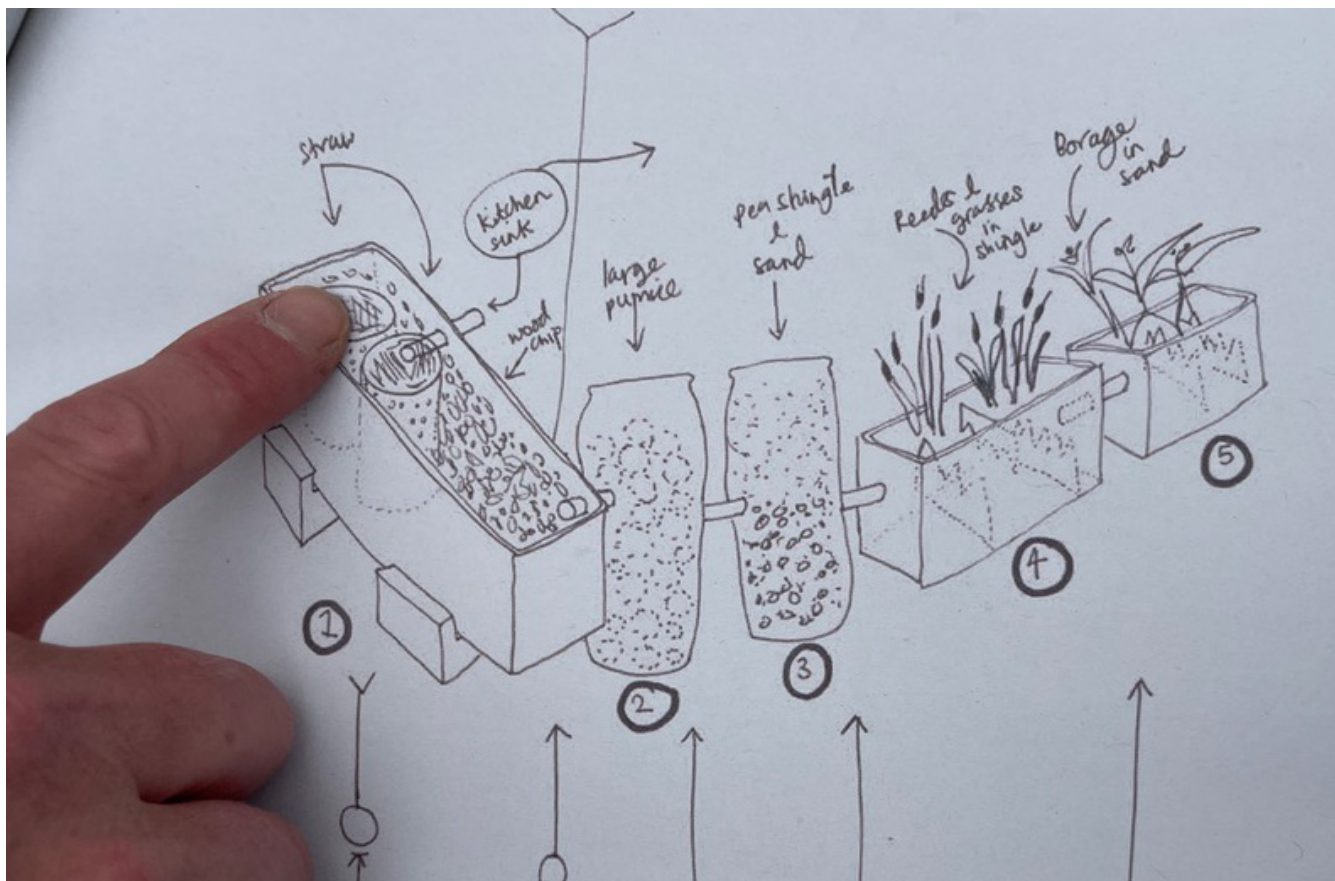


Figure 181 - Sketch of Greywater system rebuild 2023.
 Source: public works, sketch by Angharad Davies



Figure 182 - The finished kitchen greywater system in 2023



Figure 183 - Raised bed Wick growing system using upcycled IBC storage container from the food industry

site (Figures 181 and 182). These 'low-tech' prototypes are often built as part of the wider site workshop programming (e.g., green skills volunteers building re-used permaculture growing beds (Figure 183).

This collection of 'prototype infrastructures' was the backdrop for CC, the learning environment itself a space in construction. When discussing the unique character of the site during the group interview, one R-Urban member described the site itself as a 'space of demonstration', one that people are confronted by new and old technologies, in the form of prototypes, which address urban challenges (e.g., air quality, water management, material-re-use, waste sewage, etc). R-Urban and focus group participants most keenly discussed this around the on-site compost toilet¹³:

Responder 4: I feel also like having a compost toilet, is actually, quite a complicated thing to do in the city and it's very unusual and having a space where people can interact with those things, like maybe they think it's disgusting, maybe they don't think anything of it, whatever, but it's a space of demonstration [emphasis added] and it's really important.

...

Responder 1: That compost toilet. It's really cool having a compost toilet. I think it's a demonstration that the other way is now possible. Losing a compost toilet might be really sad if we end up next to Teviot Centre and we don't need a compost toilet. Let's have one anyway!

Responder 2: I was just going to say I love how people have just adapted to the compost toilet. You say, "Oh it's a compost toilet. There's no flush," and people like, "Eh?" I expected there would be so much resistance or people would be like, "Oh, I have to go home." It's like how people just have been fine with it.

In this case, the site infrastructure is a living demonstration of another way of dealing with human waste. This system, unlike our water-intensive sewage system, creates a valuable bi-product (humanure fertiliser); the toilet is a prototype system for a different or alternative way of managing urban resources. It confronts visitors with its reality (perhaps insects, smells), but visitors were often pleasantly surprised by the ease and cleanliness of this alternative (Figure 184). It acts as a demonstration

¹³ A site infrastructure that was itself based on the experiences and prototypes of R-Urban Paris and AAA who kindly shared their existing prototypes in 2019.



Figure 184 - Compost Toilet (2024), Mural by Angharad Davies

through its use and functionality, showing another possible way forward.

The compost toilet is a space which enables learning through demonstration. The learning environment extends beyond the pedagogic activity and encompasses the entirety of the hub; you learn from the space, as described by a regular workshop attendee and homeschooler:

I think it just visually, they're [interviewees children] always looking at things, even me, I've learned loads while I've been here as well, it's not just been about them, and just looking at things, being able to touch things, and the fact that you guys are just open to people being hands-on, even when we've done the workshops, it's been really hands-on, and it's welcoming.

Visitors and members learn through experience of the space. The prototypes are actively engaged with through the senses, by 'being able to touch things' and understanding them through their use. In essence, the entire site acts as a demonstration tool for alternative systems by observing, testing, and engaging with these prototype infrastructures.

The hub also demonstrates through failure when prototypes fail, R-Urban members learn by attempting to repair or fix them, e.g. The greywater rebuilds in 2023 and 2024. Part of the unique character of the place is this unfinished nature, a living prototype which is constantly being re-made. This creates spatial informality within the hub, or as described by an artist who hosted multiple workshops in CC22, a certain 'strangeness' derived from the unusual assemblage of prototypes, activities, and aesthetics:

I thought it was weird and wonderful. That was my first feeling, because it was just like this-- Well, first of all, I remember just not knowing where it was and just seeing what it was and I was like, "Well, this is a very confusing-looking space". Then your garden being in all its abundance is like a strange thing. Then there are slightly like derelict, mossy things that look like strange, I don't know, sponges. Then there is just all these nice really strange, cool-like, container architecture vibe builds [laughs] and really cool fonts [typefaces] as well. It's

like a mixture of-- I can see the designers and people with the art education engaging with the space and also loads of old prototypes of projects and then people's current just gardening.

They go on later in the interview to outline the unique spatial character of the hub:

I thought it was really exciting and it wasn't a space that I've ever seen before. I had no clue how it would look like, and I really felt it was quite unique in a really peculiar way [laughs]. I don't know how I found-- Was it attractive? Some bits of it were really weird and repulsive. Some of it were just wonderful. It was just this kind of mishmash... It's like a playground, but really cool because also it's a playground for adults.

This highlights how the informality of the architecture and the unfinished nature of the site (always in construction) contributed toward a convivial learning environment, 'a playground for adults'. This spatial informality is reflected in the informality of the pedagogy: learning takes place at your own pace, learners engage as they feel comfortable, and there is less pressure to achieve something through the process. The 'strangeness' of the hub appearance supported learners to be inquisitive and to ask questions which extended beyond the workshop content.

6.4 A Space of Openness and 'Freedom'

Yes, the freedom is key. I think what you were saying, I really second that for general [R-Urban], not just for the programme, but generally, for everything we do here. This is really, really, key to our happiness. I think that people feel that, and then they feel free.¹⁴

When analysing the use of space through particular workshop moments what is evident is the flexibility of the learning environment. Many workshops took place

¹⁴ As described by a participant of the focus group, a co-director of non-profit CIC working towards low impact lifestyles

across the entirety of the site; for example, the seed harvesting workshop started with a discussion in the classroom, moving through the garden and allotments, using the outdoor dining space to process tomato seeds and then making seed bombs, before embarking on a neighbourhood guerrilla gardening walk (See figure 185). However, most workshops hosted have this spatial fluidity, using the site to help structure pedagogic activities. Part of this unique character is learning in the open air, in nature (or at least an ecologically diverse carpark); workshops were planned partially through the movement of activities across site infrastructures. The hub is an open-air workshop or laboratory for learning. It contains all the tools and equipment for civic and climate learning; it's a space to be messy, to experiment and test. This affords a certain generosity of what can be done on-site e.g., building, discussions, cooking, gardening, performances. This is particularly helpful for practitioners who are working with ecological and natural practices, by an artist and workshop facilitator during CC22::

I don't think I've encountered a place like R-Urban, and the freedom that it provides I think is really interesting. It is also quite curious for practitioners like me who are doing things like natural dyeing and natural stuff. There is just not enough space where there is outdoor space and semi-indoor space or indoor space together. It's not what every space offers. R-Urban really grounds the practitioners that work there with the local community, especially if it's for a prolonged period of time, like it was for me.

R-Urban is a unique spatial offering: a kitchen, garden, dining space, classroom, workshop, and anaerobic digester (AD) within one site boundary. R-Urban members often have difficulty describing the space in simple terms, 'more than a community garden', 'alternative place', 'little urban oasis', and 'a playground for adults' are some of the many descriptions gathered during the interviews. At the heart of the CC programme was the kitchen and dining space; this space and all site infrastructures are spatially 'open' to visitors and members. In the focus group interview, responders were asked what makes R-Urban unique, and the response focused on the spatial openness and freedom this affords:

Responder 3: I don't know. Maybe like an alternative place. I don't know, the word alternative is stuck in my head. Alternative in a way that, yes, it's a place that's different from another community centre, for example. Maybe there's less doors here. It feels like people--

Responder 1: No doors.

Responder 3 : There's no doors?

*Responder 4 : There's one now. [laughter *pointing at new classroom door]*

Responder 3 : Yes, people can go-- That's freedom again. Being able to come and do whatever they want, almost."

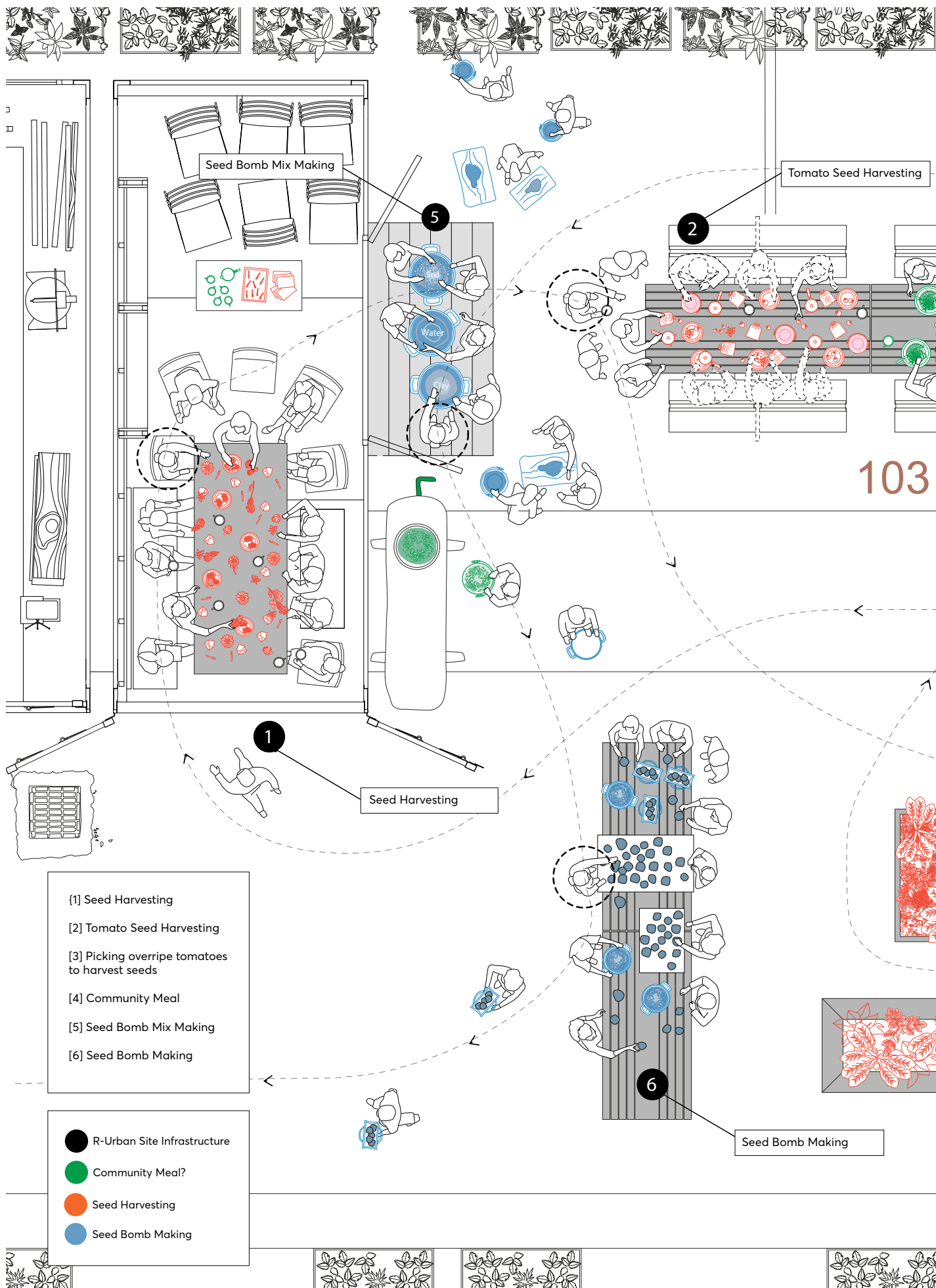
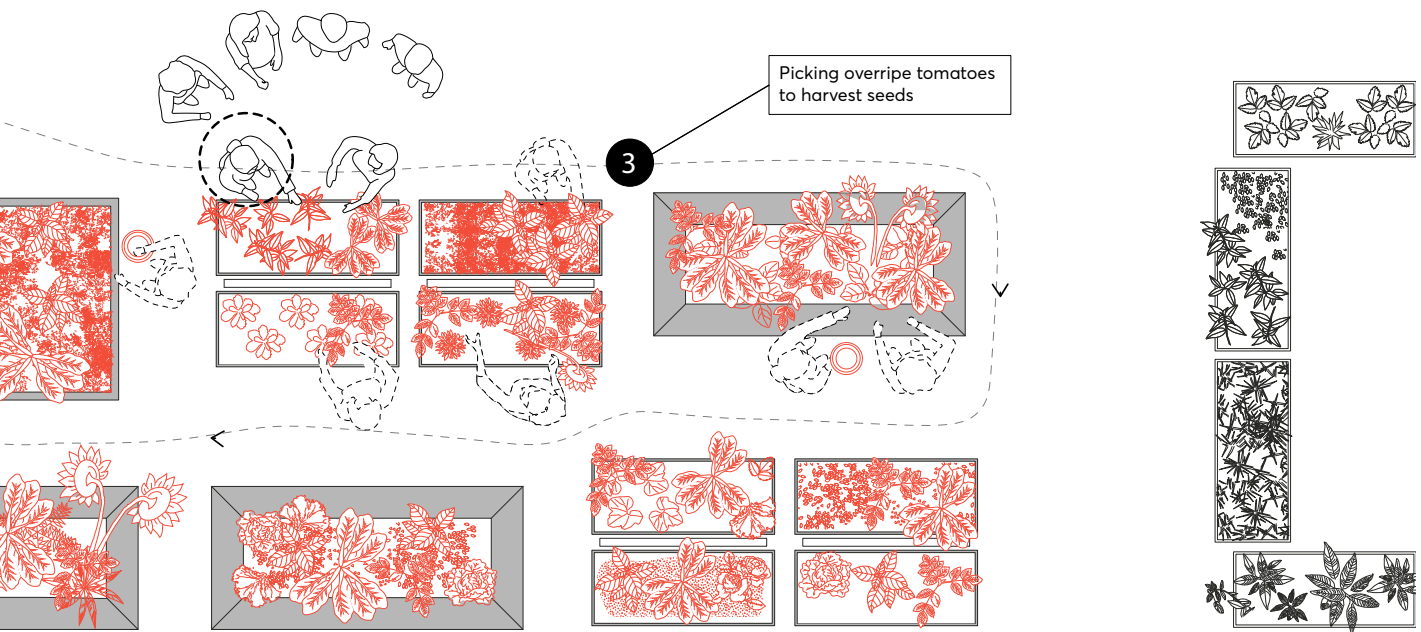
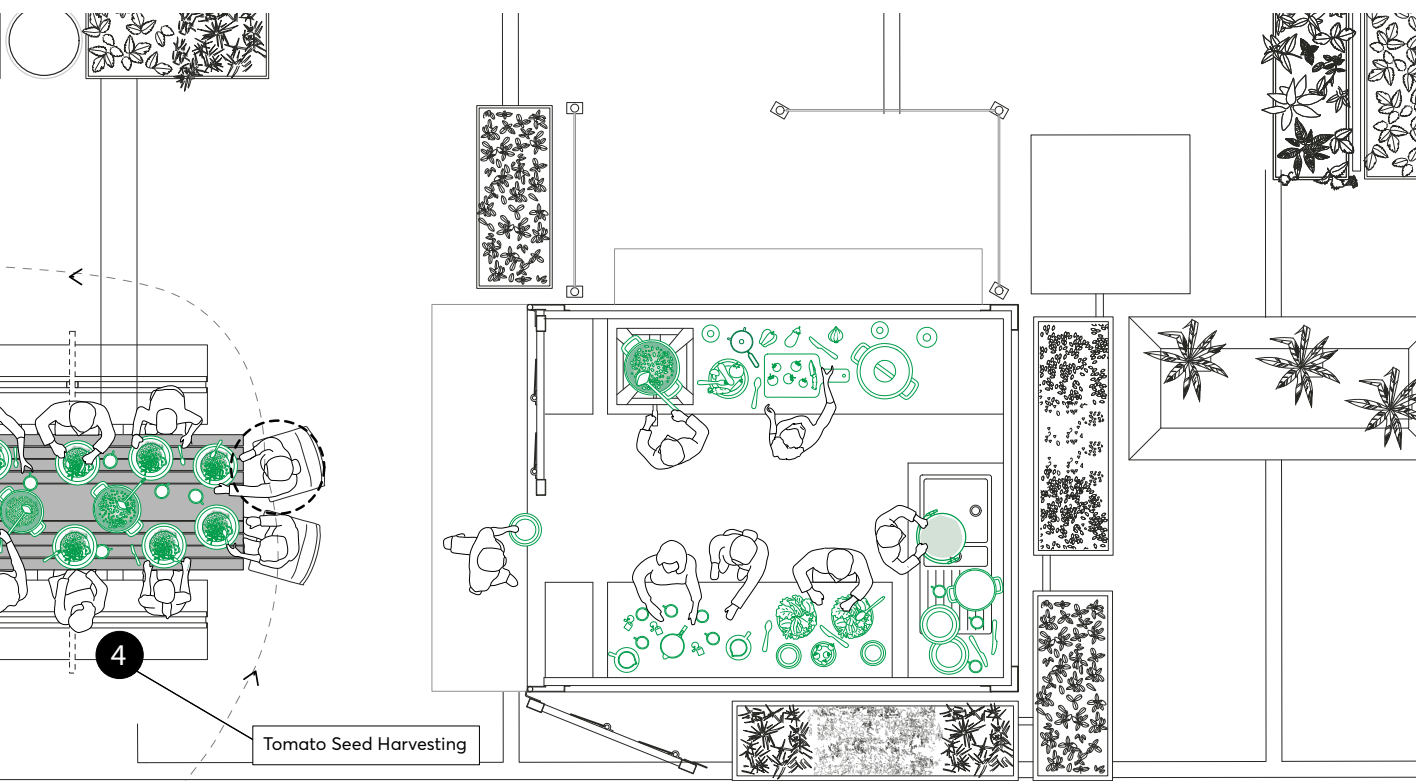


Figure 185 - Space use for Seed Harvesting Workshop 2022, highlighting spatial fluidity, openness and lack of closed doors



The lack of closed doors, in combination with its open-air setting, contributes to the sense of freedom the hub affords. A 'freedom' for learners to dip in and out, learn at their own pace, learn by exploring the hub infrastructures, and make a cup of tea in the kitchen. The hub has a defined boundary, enclosed from the adjacent road and estate, but once within the fenced area, the space is free to explore. Workshops were often punctuated by the chatter and screech of children playing games or parallel conversations between allotment holders. The hub is a space of few restrictions or strict rules, but from the outset conceived as porous and open to all:

Responder 2: A lot of spaces like this, they're people are protective of it, and they don't always let other people in. I like that we're not like, "Oh, this is our space and you can't come in." Only growers allowed or something. It's just like everyone, yes, that openness.

Responder 3 : Yes, or no children, no pets. This is rare, places that don't have a list of restrictions. Actually, we don't have restrictions.

R-Urban's spatial generosity is reflected in the openness of the members who steward this resource. The space is defined by its lack of exclusionary rules, instead favouring inclusivity as the primary objective (Figure 186). This is in the spirit of what Stavrides (2015) called 'threshold spaces', urban commons, which are both porous spatially and in their governance (enabling new commoners to join and share resources). This reflects the social dimension of the space and the importance of its values, governance, and modes of operation, which enabled the pedagogy to flourish.



Figure 186 - 'Site Rules' for visitors at R-Urban (2024)

6.5 A space of Care and Inclusion

The spatial generosity and openness are reflected in the learning approach at R-Urban. Unlike institutional learning environments where the aim is to develop qualification or assessment, at R-Urban the aim is to support learners to be engaged in the content and community of practice. When discussing R-Urban as a site of civic learning with focus group members (all working as regular facilitators and hosts), they focused on this inherent difference in learning between these two approaches:

Responder 3: The aim of the session is not for participants to achieve or to do well.

Responder 2: We're not so pass and fail.

Responder 3: That is true. That's a very different approach actually. The main thing is for them to take part and to have fun, and that's it really.

Responder 4: And intergenerational in a way that you don't always have a peer group that is the same.

Responder 2: If someone's struggling, you can take the time to support them. Whereas in the classroom environment, you're relying on the teacher assistant or the child just gets left behind. Nobody really gets left behind in these sessions.

This response highlights the role of the host organisation in creating a welcoming learning environment. Creating a hospitable place is partially the responsibility of the specific workshop facilitator, but the site equally plays a key role here. R-Urban members took on hosting duties during the CC programme, welcoming visitors, offering cups of tea, glasses of lemonade, engaging in 'small talk' and friendly welcomes, as described by a first-time workshop host and co-design group member:

I think you guys connect with people really well. The R-Urban team, you guys go above and beyond to make that connection with people. I think that's what's really warming and inviting about that space. A lot of people go in there, and the moment we introduce you guys, you've got so much to tell them. There's something that connects with them that brings them back.

...

It's just a very welcoming place, very friendly people, and you are always there to help. You're always there to listen.

Kim Trogal (2012) referred to these small actions as ‘care gestures’ in analysing the role of spatial practitioners in creating welcoming and convivial spaces of inclusion. This feeling of being ‘welcomed’ and valued is an essential component of the pedagogic experience. These are values which are rooted in the R-Urban hub from the outset, reflecting a wider care ethic which grounds the hub. Care is manifest through this role of ‘host’, which through the programme, became a responsibility shared between multiple organisations and members. In this case, to ‘care for’ learners was to make them feel ‘comfortable’ within R-Urban, as described by a focus group participant and regular R-Urban facilitator:

I think it works because everyone who is in this space has a capacity to host and create a space in which you can have those conversations. We are listening, and the same with Responder 1, you are able to make people feel incredibly comfortable. That's half of the work of facilitating the thing [workshops].

This care ethic also defines the inclusivity of the CC and R-Urban programmes. The hub tries to make space for multiple cultures, groups, and bodies to co-exist in one space. R-Urban is a place within the city where participants encounter difference (e.g. cultures, genders). In the previous chapter, I discussed how the pedagogic activities were at times ‘through togetherness’, this extends to the space and its members who govern it and the way in which R-Urban members make a welcoming space for all, as described by a member of the co-design group:

I think the other thing as well, you guys [R-Urban] offer a variety as well. You listen to your community really well, and that's why the program is so diverse. It meets everybody, and it keeps inviting people back. I've seen some people when I'm in the steering group at the Poplar HARCA [local housing association] meetings, they're so divided. They'll sit with their community, and they wouldn't

want to mix with the other communities. At R-Urban, the way your whole setup is, everyone just mingles, and everyone just gets along.

[Later in the interview – they come back to reflect on this further]

I've come from a lot of neighbourhoods, and there is a complete divide. No matter what the Poplar HARCA do, the community is just tense. Even the programs that are different within LIC [local community centre], they're very divided. You've got the Bangladeshi community, you've got the Teviot action group [Estate community group], they're very particular. No matter what you do, they would never integrate.

I think what you guys did over in our event [Bangla Feast and Pickle Making CC23], like I said, because of the way the space is, when people want to come to it, like [name 1], you've got the other gentleman, was it, [name 2]? Yes.

When they come in, they actually do get integrated with the community. But when they're within their communities, it's very different. They're very divided. It's nice that we can see the other side of them as well when they're in that community.

At least in this account and many of the reflections of interviewees, the R-Urban hub is perceived to be fairly unique (within Poplar) in bringing together multiple communities through a mutual interest in sustainable living. This contrasts with the supposed division of communities into smaller cultural groups that do not interact in everyday life. R-Urban's combination of spatial openness and the inherent care of its members (through gestures and values) are integral in creating a space that is convivial for learning. Doina Petrescu and Constantin Petcou (2020) describe the role of hub infrastructures (in Paris) in enabling community economies to thrive, describing the need for spaces of encounter and conviviality for communities to learn how 'alternative' economies and ways of socially organising can sustain everyday life. R-Urban Poplar continues this lineage, a space which enables encounters with difference, a space enacted through care, to learn and interact with another way of living, to share values with diverse groups and form relational networks in support of wider justice movements.

6.6 Discussion on the Designed Spaces of Civic Learning

The following discussion aims to respond to RQ2: The following discussion aims to respond to RQ2: Which spaces enable transformative civic learning? And what are their distinct characteristics? In analysing the role of R-Urban Poplar, it seeks to extend debates around the urban commons as natural allies for civic learning.

6.6.1 Demonstrating Civic Values by Commoning Space

Existing discourse on urban commons highlights their role as spaces of ‘active resistance’ in attempting to create viable alternatives (in the present) to dominant capitalist hegemonies of urban production (Stavrides, 2015, 2023; Massimo De Angelis, 2017). Extant literature focuses on the collective governance and sharing of spatial resources within urban commons (Foster and Iaione, 2019). This thesis argues that urban commons (like R-Urban Poplar) have a unique role in enabling CP by learning from these active ‘visions’ for more equitable urban futures.

In this case, R-Urban acted as a ‘space of demonstration’; the learning inquiry starts from the moment you enter the hub. As a learner, you are immediately confronted by prototypes and infrastructures which point to another way of doing things, specifically infrastructures which address urban challenges (waste systems, circular strategies, urban food production, etc). These active demonstrations create an important learning environment, especially when addressing topics such as climate emergency, as ‘alternatives’ to our existing urban systems (sanitation, urban landscapes, resource use) are hard to visualise. By engaging in their messy reality, we can demystify challenges that, at first glance seem insurmountable: building living demonstrations for lower-impact urban living in the present. In our case, the hub was an integral learning infrastructure, by observing and participating, learners were passively engaging with an emerging vision for another possible city. Urban commons with a focus on socio-ecological transitions, prototyping, and direct engagement with low-impact living make for rich learning environments for CP.

Beyond the hub's physicality and role as prototype demonstrator, urban commons embody social values and governance mechanisms which can respond more directly to local needs. Rather than designing learning environments around courses, qualifications, assessment, and competition, the hub is organised around inherent values of inclusivity and collective sharing in the neighbourhood. R-Urban Poplar has an informal governance mechanism based on mutual trust between embedded enterprises, local food growers and active citizen members (Belfield and Petrescu, 2024). The hub is set up with the sharing of resources as an inherent aim, creating a common pool resource which can be accessed and shared by multiple organisations and citizen members. The hub is stewarded by multiple voices, although legal responsibility for the site (lease and insurance) still falls on public works. This collective approach to R-Urban stewardship acts as a demonstration for other ways of organising and governing urban spaces in cities. This is not to say that this informal governance is without challenges, e.g. lack of transparency from those outside the R-Urban members group, making sure all individual needs are met to the best extent possible, time and financial scarcity, etc. However, the hub's longevity (2017-present) is a working demonstration of a different logic for managing urban space. This connects with wider pedagogic aims of civic learning by providing working examples (for learners) of 'alternative', possible urban futures, by demonstrating the value of citizen power in effectively governing urban resources. This form of active demonstration (of prototypes and ways of sharing resources) creates an environment where participants learn by first observing, touching, and sensing before engaging more deeply as direct stewards of the hub.

6.6.2 Informal Spaces of Care and Inclusion

One shared value within the members of the hub is an ethic of care, which manifests in multiple ways. Firstly, through 'care gestures' (Trogal, 2012) and small acts where hosts 'care for' newcomers in the spirit of inclusivity. Second, by 'caring about' the planetary and local environment's wellbeing through the everyday

maintenance and reproduction of the hub. Finally, what sets R-Urban and other urban commons apart from institutional learning spaces is their ability to 'care with' (Tronto, 2019); reflecting mutuality and reciprocity of the care acts, they create feedback loops of caring relations which extend beyond the hub towards the wider neighbourhood, scaling their impact. This embedded 'care ethic' is a vital component in creating an inclusive and convivial learning environment. In this case, care is a value and social infrastructure which enables a wider reach for the pedagogy. Caring environments make accessibility (physical and knowledge) and inclusivity (abilities, ethnicities, ages) integral to the pedagogic experience. In doing so, they expand the possibilities of care within the neighbourhood, they reach new audiences and demonstrate the potential to 'care with' others through ecological action.

Climate Companions was influenced by the hub and equally, in return, continued to shape the space's evolution. The pedagogies were moments of 'opening up' to new voices and participants, enabling the common to remain 'porous' to new commoners (Stavrides, 2015, 2023). This porosity works both ways; firstly, it creates an inclusive learning environment by welcoming all abilities and identities, then in turn, 'newcomers' may reciprocate by becoming active stakeholders and members of the hub. This duality is inherent within the space and the values which govern it, they continue to prevent the enclosure of the resource, keeping the threshold and boundary open. CP, therefore, have a transformative potential in influencing the future visions of R-Urban, by diversifying membership whilst equally transmitting a care ethic and neighbourhood sharing to new members.

During the pedagogies the R-Urban hub became the base for action, a space of 'freedom' and openness where learners can test ideas, develop skills and share knowledge towards addressing socio-spatial challenges. I would add 'spatial informality' as a core characteristic in the making of an inclusive pedagogy with wide appeal. This is partly derived from the spatial infrastructure of R-Urban. The 'slightly strange' collection of eco-civic prototypes contributes to the learning atmosphere through active demonstration and their experimental aesthetic. In some cases, these prototype infrastructures fail (e.g. the greywater system being overloaded

after a community feast); however, the unfinished nature contributes to the inclusive atmosphere, encouraging further learning by doing, actions and learning from failure. This is combined with a spatial and programmatic 'openness' within the hub: a lack of closed doors, learning in the open air, and a 'space of freedom' to act in different ways. This is a hub that should never 'be finished' or seen as a complete, instead seen as a laboratory for continued exploration and iteration.

I would argue that this informality and openness help less confident learners overcome hurdles to knowledge accessibility. In a space which is free from institutional restrictions, learners can simply 'be' with little expectation or pressure of assessment. Instead, the caring atmosphere supports learners to engage with the pedagogic content; these are civic classrooms of care. R-Urban was described as a 'playground for adults', and many interview reflections described the joyful, welcoming atmosphere of the hub. This convivial learning environment supports 'encounter' with new knowledges, different perspectives and, importantly, a space in which to engage with diverse ethnicities, genders and identities, within a neighbourhood which historically was deeply divided along race identity (see Chapter 3). At present, urban spaces which encourage togetherness and cohesion are important in addressing wider societal injustices. Through the hub's inclusivity and openness, a space of 'diverse knowledge exchange and translation' is created, itself a form of productive urban learning forum as highlighted by McFarlane (2011). Their spatial 'informality' and the inherent social values of the group contribute to a sense of inclusivity and encounter. I argue they are most productive when 'unfinished' and 'open' in a constant state of reproduction, as seen here in Poplar.

6.7 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter aimed to extend our understanding of the ‘designed spaces of civic learning’ by unpacking the CC case and R-Urban. The findings focused on three dimensions of the hub as a space of demonstration, openness and care. This discussion points to three main conclusions that have implications for future CP in both theory and practice.

Firstly, civic learning spaces operate effectively when ‘under construction’ in both physical and social conditions. The prototype nature of the hub enabled learning through demonstration and proximity (to low-impact lifestyles, commoning values, by touching circular infrastructures). The openness of R-Urban to new members and groups was significant in enabling the pedagogy and further demonstration of common values. As outlined in the literature on commons, they must always remain porous (as resources) to newcomers. CP support commons to remain open through the expansion of the network to new groups and citizens whilst reciprocating to learners, creating a pathway for their future involvement; they are spaces always under social construction. In the case of CC, the pedagogy embedded within R-Urban was integral to the learning experience, providing an anchor to place that condenses social relations and becomes an outlet for future action. Urban commons, such as R-Urban, create a direct relationship to the neighbourhood, supporting learners in moving beyond the self to collective experiences in which the neighbourhood is partially a learning infrastructure (see Chapter 5). Urban commons, which are porous and embedded within neighbourhood socio-spatial contexts, are ideal sites for directly addressing urban justice and constructing civic knowledge. The inverse relation, i.e., civic knowledge mobilised through the pedagogy, is supportive in continuing to construct the common; they are co-dependent practices.

The second conclusion extends the thinking of McFarlane’s (2011) urban learning forums. In this case, the addition of ‘informality’ within this assemblage links to the capacity for care within urban commons. I argue that the informality and incomplete nature (of the space and its governance) enables the hub to reach beyond ‘usual

suspects', engaging diverse audiences that may not necessarily see themselves as natural 'activists'. The informality supports R-Urban's ability to 'care for' diverse learners by accommodating specific learner needs, always welcoming others, and creating a convivial environment. In this setting, care is reciprocated beyond the hub towards others through 'care gestures', which catalyse a process in which citizens begin to 'care with' others. In the case of CC, I see the ability to care being nurtured through the pedagogy, and then within the hub, it is a learning environment that is made accessible and inclusive through its informality.

In Chapter 2 (literature review) I outlined how the spaces of civic learning were either at the edges of institutions (urban rooms and living labs) or embedded within new spaces that critically re-imagine learning environments. Having engaged so directly within urban commons through the research, I would speculate that CP are more effective when embedded within civic and grassroots settings rather than at the edges of institutions. This is primarily for the two prior conclusions outlined above. The openness, informality and porosity of the urban commons enable wider civic reach and potential for further action. Even on the boundaries of institutions, learning frameworks, liability, and governance limit the possibility of fully open civic learning processes like CC. This is not to say that academics and their institutions cannot support and enhance CP. However, the civic groups, urban commons, and citizens must lead the process. I would argue that CP need a certain degree of independence from academic arenas, but there are still vast possibilities for allyships between them.

7.0 Design

7.1 Chapter Overview

Chapter Seven explores the role of design(ers) in enabling civic pedagogies in non-institutional learning environments. ‘Climate Companions’ was collectively designed with many hands, utilising co-design methods to allow diverse voices to co-produce trial pedagogies. This chapter contributes to debates in the field of design, first reflecting on the processes and tools used before unpacking the roles adopted by the author and the wider community of practice formed through the process. It answers part of **RQ2: Which design tools (and roles) enable transformative civic learning? And what are their distinct characteristics?** The chapter’s findings are primarily supported by the author’s and project initiator’s auto-ethnographic reflections, and where possible, triangulated with post-evaluation interview accounts from citizen members of the co-design process. In this case, a substantial body of data exists on the role of the co-design initiator, but there is only partial and more speculative evidence regarding the experience of non-expert citizen co-designers. Despite this limitation, the overall conclusions resonate with much of the existing co-design literature, which reinforces their validity as findings.

7.2 Co-Design Aim and Context

The process used co-design methods in strategic moments to structure the co-creative journey. As outlined in Chapter 4, co-design practices are well established in commoning settings (Baibarac and Petrescu, 2019; Bassetti et al., 2019) and in enabling emancipatory civic learning (Antaki and Petrescu, 2023). In this case, co-design had two main aims: first, to support the formation of a ‘community of practice’ (CoP) around the learning programme, and second, to respond to their learning ‘needs and desires’, to ensure pedagogic relevance to the local neighbourhood and context.

R-Urban Poplar members already had prior experience with co-design methods through participation in the ProSHARE research initiative (Figure 187) (Petrescu et al., 2022). Co-design tools are helpful for enabling long-term relationship building between civic actors/academics and grassroots partners (Björgvinsson, Ehn, and



Figure 187 - ProSHARE Co-mapping workshop (2022), R-Urban members and neighbourhood associations mapping sharing networks

Hillgren, 2012) and, in this case, effective for setting parameters when adopting new roles as academics/researchers beyond my individual capacity as an R-Urban member.

Co-design can ‘open up’ existing commons and keep their boundaries porous by enabling more diverse participation in the reproduction of the lab (Belfield and Petrescu, 2024). Championing underrepresented voices is a central task of any democratic and user-centred design process; they are messy and always in negotiation (Huybrechts, Benesch and Geib, 2017). Binder and Brandt (2008) argue that co-design can reduce inherent social hierarchies when all participants have something ‘at stake’ in the process. Successful co-design must address the ‘needs’ of the CoP to create opportunities to support engaged stakeholders. This understanding of design theory captures the initial ‘designerly’ intent of the process: to respond to desires and urgencies, to expand the network through a new CoP and to ‘open up’ the R-Urban hub to new alliances and networks.

7.3 Co-Design Tools for Climate Companions

7.3.1 Assembling a Community of Practice

Across both trial pedagogies (2022 and 2023), design approaches were utilised with varying degrees of success to widen decision-makers participation in the process. R-Urban was a pre-existing space of co-creation with community members and social enterprises working collaboratively towards resilient urban futures. However, this process has always been closely governed by public works as site custodians and leaseholders.

CC was an opportunity to ‘open up’ R-Urban to new or overlooked voices, to collectively design a civic pedagogy which reflected local desires. The first attempt

was through an 'open call' to the R-Urban mailing list and shared via social media. This 'call' received no responses, which may reflect a low engagement with the readership or a lack of clarity in defining what was 'at stake' for participation. To address this, the second programme in 2023 (CC23) was more direct in approaching workshop attendees and residents who had attended previous workshops or expressed a desire to get involved in day-to-day R-Urban volunteering. In total, thirteen participants were identified (by the R-Urban team), ten accepting the invitation to join two co-design workshops and steer the 2023 programme towards individual 'learning needs, interests and desires' (see Portfolio pages 216-231). In total, nine (of ten) participants were women, ranging in age from 30-60, and diverse ethnic backgrounds (Bengali-British, British-Bengali, British-Somali, British-Vietnamese, European, British-Caribbean, North American), no participants could be considered 'design expert' or had formal design training.

Co-design workshops became the tool which enabled the formation of CoP, with a mutual desire to learn together (Wenger, 1999). To create a workshop setting where participants could reflect personal learning desires and build relations within the group. Food played a supportive role in this setting, creating a convivial space of discussion and supporting a group to get to know one another in a relaxed setting. 'Discursive Dinners' are an event format public works first came across from Markus Bader (Raumlabor) in their Urban School Ruhr programme (Aßmann et al., 2017). Discursive Dinners use food, its preparation and consumption, as a staging for collective discussions around a theme or idea. In this case, 'courses' were designed in relation to workshop activities, and the learning programme was designed in dialogue with preparing and eating food.

This created a space of generosity and softened the edges of what could otherwise be a rigidly structured workshop. Eating together allowed space for conversations between participants beyond the immediate workshop purpose, getting to know one and another, asking after each other's families, sharing recipes and reflections, as described by this co-design group participant and a regular attendee of CC workshops in 22 and 23:

I also think the format was really nice with the two dinners. It was just funny because a lot of the people I knew, but it was just a way to get to know each other better, and then also to probably discover, "Oh, we have some very similar interests".

Food and the ritual of dining also became a generative space for participants, forming relations, sharing ideas, and bringing different ideas to the table, as described by another member of the co-design group and first-time workshop host:

Food is always bringing up ideas. Having a conversation around food, food you are always thinking about different things. It brings culture together. We're a very mixed, diverse group of women. It would be lovely to have a male member in there as well from the community. It'll be nice just to hear from them, but I think just generally just some of us are parents, some of us are co-parents, some of us are grandparents, earlier, earlier, so, it's a really diverse group with bringing different ideas on board.

This social setting within a structured design process was important in building trusting relations between participants. Many knew each other in passing from other events or workshops, but this was an opportunity to form better connections. Trust is formed through a shared sense of commonality; sharing food (cultures) helps to form bonds rooted in a mutual experience. Food is a lens that enables participants to engage with 'other' cultures, e.g. sharing recipes for Bangla food (Pakora) or when one participant brought a dessert (Pandan Cake), which was synonymous with their Vietnamese heritage. As discussed more broadly in Chapter 6, these small 'care gestures' help to form mutual trust between participants in civic spaces. Although possible to overlook, I would argue that they are vital in forming mutuality and reciprocity within a collective process. In this instance, designing the setting, cooking the dinner, facilitating the co-design exercises, and washing up the pots and plates became a small act of care for participants. A way to offer something in exchange for their participation, a modest care gesture to make it an equitable experience.

7.3.2 Co-Mapping Needs, Desires and Relations

The second aim was to ensure learning reflected the community's needs and desires. Participatory Design and co-design literature is extensively familiar with grounding 'local needs' in design-based solutions to ensure their ongoing relevance within the neighbourhood (Huybrechts, Benesch, and Geib, 2017; Huybrechts et al., 2020). In this case, 'needs and desires' were framed in relation to the co-design of a pedagogic programme.

Co-learners individually reflected over dinner on workshops, ideas, skills, and knowledge they wished to acquire through participation. This was then formalised through a post-it note workshop as a group, where all were invited to suggest skills, knowledge, and actions which CC23 could address. This was a harvesting of desires, helping to reflect a broad spectrum of learning needs. Participants' suggestions were diverse, ranging from learning specific skills for repair (darning and natural dye workshops), beekeeping and workshops to connect with nature, places to share everyday knowledge, tips and recipes (e.g., home via pickling and fermenting) (Figure 188). During the ideas harvesting, participants were asked to articulate how it connected to the CC aim or, more generally, to sustainable urban practices. Most suggestions focused on skills-based learning, reflecting the immediacy of incorporating and adapting individual habits rather than ambitious collective actions, which needed more resourcing and planning.

This first exercise was also an opportunity to reflect on individual capacity (for delivering the CP) and personal social connections with the neighbourhood, inviting the group to suggest new partners and facilitators or whether they could individually participate as 'hosts' of individual workshops within the CC23 programme. This approach helps to address existing 'capabilities' within the CoP and supports

co-learners in moving towards adopting future responsibilities within R-Urban. A capability approach to co-design is significant as it helps participants to situate and realise existing agencies rather than always being a community othered or 'in need'. Finding methods that support existing capabilities and nurture existing resources can be understood as part of the 'resourceful' (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2013) approach to civic resilience within the R-Urban.

The second co-design workshop took place two weeks later, with the group returning for a second discursive dinner to continue the co-design. This workshop started with a recap of the ideas harvested, and work carried out to cluster these ideas into thematic strands: habitats, low-impact living, preservation, wild foods, herbs and wellbeing, discussions, talks, screenings and visits. A second round of ideas harvesting was done at this point in relation to these new thematic areas, and the group started to plan details of the proposed session, e.g., identifying workshop hosts or external organisations for new collaborations.

The second session aimed to connect individual learner needs to a wider socio-spatial context. First, identifying possible collaborators, allies, and groups to connect with, then mapping and identifying points of interest geographically (carried out via an analogue mapping exercise). Co-mapping is a well-used co-design tool within grassroots settings, allowing participants to reflect on existing relationalities and networks at the neighbourhood scale (Belfield and Petrescu, 2024). In this case, the process helped participants share their existing situated knowledge(s) towards the wider collective pedagogy. Sharing neighbourhood insights (places of interest, curiosities) and visualising existing connections to other local groups. This helped support two things: first, it enabled co-learners to have something else at stake in the process, realising their place within the actor network at the scale of Poplar, and supporting the expansion of the R-Urban network to new groups. Second, it supported the group in thinking beyond individual learning concerns toward more civic-oriented learning, e.g., around places within the neighbourhood that were overlooked or uncared for (Figure 189).

One co-design group participant highlighted the impact of the co-mapping session, giving an example of how it shaped thinking beyond individual learning concerns and how future curriculums could be more embedded within a network of neighbourhood groups rather than only at R-Urban:

I thought it was really interesting, when we did that map in the steering group session, just to see how many little organisations or initiatives there are. That's probably a good way then to interact with some of these [groups]. That was one of the ideas where I thought, again, if it's something over consecutive weeks, where, for example, with the Felix project [A London based food waste charity], one could think there's a talk about food waste, then like a picking workshop, and then maybe something, visiting the Felix project, that it's like all these bits and pieces.

The simple exercise of mapping on paper revealed the multiple connections that participants had already made. It became a discursive moment, with participants contributing their knowledge to a collective whole, a new network to collaborate with through the pedagogy. Although this moment was helpful in scaling ambition, it did lack the further development and complexity required to move beyond network and spatial mapping. The co-design method was naïve in lacking the foresight to carry out further exercises or deeper group analysis. However, it did shape the subsequent curriculum design; the first event of the CC23 programme was the 'Green Spaces Network Walk', which linked up the local community gardens with guided tours. Many subsequent sessions directly addressed the 'points of interest' identified, such as the Limehouse Cut (through a group canoe and habitat exploration of the canal). Co-Mapping supported the group in thinking beyond the immediacy of skills-based learning, helping the CoP to think through the scale of the neighbourhood, which is a first step towards further civic activism.

7.4 Design Roles

Multiple roles were adopted during the research within the co-design workshops and the wider co-learning experience. In co-creative processes, roles are fluid, developing in accordance with capability for action and holding the requisite skills to enact them. This next section reflects on the shifting pathways through CC, first from an auto-ethnographic 'design expert' perspective, reflecting on individual responsibilities garnered through the research. Second, it unpacks the various roles adopted by citizen members of the co-design group.

7.4.1 Design-researcher – Initiating, Mediating and Facilitating

This research reflects broader design activism in its intent to bring about social and environmental change (Fuad-Luke, 2013). This framing is important, as it helps to define the first role of the design-researcher, the 'Initiator'. Whilst CC was co-designed and co-produced, it was conceived in its infancy as part of this PhD research. R-Urban needs were identified by being embedded within the hub, having weekly conversations with members, informal chats at the dining table, over cups of tea, and asking members for their reflections. The hub's need for more diverse participation in civic learning was established through a deep hanging out by being a companion of the existing members.

Once started, the role of initiator required adopting responsibility for grant writing, the programme management and labour costs for workshops. For the CC programmes, revenue funding for R-Urban to fully resource the programmes came from the local housing association and joint venture partnership (Teviot LLP). In this case, the programme aims aligned with the funder's interests in improving local wellbeing and connection to the neighbourhood. This was fortuitous in some respects as funding was allocated directly within Poplar's neighbourhood, with Teviot's residents as the primary beneficiary. Without this grant funding, resourcing

would have been far more limited, and the scope of the research diminished. Secured funding went towards the direct costs of the programme, including paying for people's time, materials, and other direct expenses.

Initiating is something which most architects and designers feel comfortable with, often taught through years of design education to be proactive, to intervene, and to design solutions to problems in design studio settings. Antaki and Petrescu (2023) describe this initiating role as 'agents' of the co-creative process, recognising that architects and spatial practitioners are well placed to take this on for CP. Agents 'to make things happen' (Manzini, 2014) by listening to, being prepared to intervene, and taking the time to engage and work with communities on the ground.

Beyond initiating processes, being a facilitator and mediator of the shared learning process was a key role adopted by the author. Manzini (2015) is again an excellent frame of reference for thinking about these roles writing,

... the design experts' role is one of mediator (between different interests) and facilitator (of other participants' ideas and initiatives), but also includes the design experts' creativity and culture (i.e., their ability to conceive large scenarios and/or original design proposals) and the possibility of using them to trigger the social conversation and to feed it with new ideas. (p. 49)

This clearly distinguishes between the two roles, placing the design expert at the centre in joining the unforeseen dots and expanding the framing and intent of the process. Reflecting on designers within institutional settings, Teli et al. (2022) describe this process as 'intermediation' in the expansion of co-design practices to 'embrace' their role in advocating and reconciling diverse interests (2022, p.5). Similarly, mediation plays an integral role in education and learning, "...to be a conciliator between knowledge and the learner" (Delgado Álvarez, 2013, p. 515). In both interpretations, mediation creates a discursive space in which interests, understandings and positions are collectively brought into shared understanding.

A key responsibility as a mediator in this design process was to ensure that all voices felt heard, preventing group discussions from being dominated by confident voices. This involved actively checking in with less vocal members and individual follow-ups outside of group discussions to allow other space for reflections and input. As outlined in this auto-ethnographic diary, I kept during the process:

I cut the cake into slices and encourage everyone to take one. We then move into the workshop proper, and I ask people to throw out ideas for the programme which focus on specific skills or knowledge. One participant is straight in there with many suggestions, she's great, enthusiastic but sometimes speaks over others. I make a conscious effort to ensure everyone has a turn to read their suggestions, making eye contact and taking everyone in turn... I think the fact it's an all women group is conducive to the discussion, despite my earlier worries, and felt everyone had a good turn to share thoughts.

Transparency in the process was also key to the mediation of the process, making it clear that the ideas harvesting for CC workshops would not necessarily immediately translate into a curriculum. Managing group expectations of what was feasible within project constraints, e.g., the unlikelihood of collaborating with a famous YouTube gardener or tight budgetary constraints. Key to this role is holding trust with the co-design group. Trust in this case was formed over time and familiarity, previous accountability for project responsibilities and a genuine desire to improve what was done at R-Urban through this project. Without this trust, co-design would not be possible, and the facilitation and mediation of the design process would have been less successful.

In other moments, the author adopted the role of facilitator of the design process and pedagogies. Unlike mediation, which was more closely aligned to the co-design workshop phase, facilitation occurred throughout the one-year fieldwork period. Facilitation was extended towards the 'workshop hosts' during the programme, acting as an enabler, problem-solving logistical issues, providing introductions, and setting the context for their workshops, as described in this diary extract:

[The workshop host] is a little nervous to begin with as she's not often a workshop facilitator and is cooking her mother's recipe for the first time in public. The workshop is to make two traditional Bengali pickles and chutneys. The first is a raw mango pickle - Kacha Ammer Achar, which uses very small Bangladeshi mangoes. The second was a sweet and sour Bangladeshi plum achar called Boro Achar, this was cooked down in molasses with some spices and little chilli. I reassure her that it will be wonderful and everyone coming is just excited to learn new a new recipe and all our members around on hand to support where necessary...It was a classic R-Urban workshop, some people really engaged and following step by step, chopping and preparing all the ingredients and some just there to hang out and socialise. The feast is delicious, one of the best. R-Urban insists on vegetarian meals for inclusivity reasons, but fish is such a huge part of the Bangla diet, it raises challenging questions around role of education, justice and discussions around veganism within different food cultures.

This is important in making the learning experience more rewarding for both workshop hosts and learners, involving the re-framing of the wider CC aim and supporting them in catering to the specificities and needs of the R-Urban audience.

7.4.2 Design-educator: Co-curating Learning Processes

During the co-design phase my role of facilitator was in the gathering of participants' learnings 'needs and desires'. Facilitation involved taking these desires forward and supporting the group in expanding networks and initiatives to which they were connected. My personal grounding as both 'designer' and 'educator'¹⁵ was significant in taking on this role; familiarity with both fields is required to mediate the development of group capabilities whilst utilising design tools to facilitate wider co-creation. In this case, deploying new co-design methods within the group helped facilitate this process, providing the overall structure and rhythm to conversational

¹⁵ Developed through many years of engaged teaching within architecture and art schools in UK and Europe

and discursive experience. Beyond the deployment of effective tools, the design-educator role is also in the space between workshops, making these learning desires possible and finding potential workshop facilitators, spaces, equipment, logistics, and critical framing to make it real.

To some extent, this could be framed as a process of design ‘curation’, blending multiple ingredients to realise the collective pedagogy. It is a reminder of another architect/ urban curator, Rosario Televi, who described her curatorial work for ‘climate care’ when visiting R-Urban. Rosario described the ‘beautifully mundane admin’ in reference to the labour and (joy of it) of pulling together a collective pedagogy with others. In this case, the curatorial role was found in organising, budgeting, inviting, writing, and promoting on behalf of a greater collective. In essence, the labour and tasks to convene the pedagogy were more widely distributed across the co-design group. I would term this process ‘co-curation’ given how the pedagogy was conceived, organised, and implemented through the collective. It was by ‘making’ a CP together that the richness of the learning experience is most keenly felt.

7.4.3 Co-Learners, Inherent ‘Enthusiasm’ and Adopting New Roles

If co-learning is the reflective practice of making collective pedagogies without hierarchy (Gough et al., 2023), to be a co-learner is to directly participate within the CoP in a process of joint learning, to position the design-researcher as equal partner and learner rather than ‘expert’ or ‘lead’. This is straightforward within collectively taught and designed learning programmes like CC, given the plurality of knowledge being shared, exchanged, and enacted. Whilst there were moments when I contributed my own skills (e.g., hempcrete eco-construction workshops), the majority of the experience was personally enlightening and reflective. During CC, there were many moments of ignorance and not-knowing, embracing this position and simply becoming an ‘enthusiastic amateur’ as one of the co-design group members and a regular attendee termed it when discussing what they could teach in the future:

*Responder: It's funny because even with hosting something, I've always thought about it a little bit, am I expert enough? **But what we just said, the pure experts, and then the enthusiastic amateurs** [emphasis added]. I probably fall into the enthusiastic category.*

Enthusiasm is an essential component in co-learning, as well as having passion for the content to meaningfully take something from the pedagogic experience. In this case, the co-design group self-selected it as an example of learning for the sake (and joy) of it. There were no course requirements, grades, earning outcomes, or qualifications, but it was an example of learning in its emancipatory potential by nurturing existing capabilities. In part, co-learning is to recognise the value you already have within the group, what knowledge(s) you could contribute or, at a minimum, to bring 'enthusiasm' to learn and share with others.

Of the nine members of the co-design group, seven became active co-learners during CC23, with two participants relocating from the neighbourhood and struggling to manage the travel and everyday challenges associated with their move. The remaining seven were all deeply engaged and actively participated during the summer of 2023. Their participation also required them to take on new roles derived through the design process. The group became its promoters and advocates on behalf of R-Urban, inviting friends and encouraging neighbours to attend sessions. They distributed flyers to their children's schools and helped to spread the word via WhatsApp groups and other organisation newsletters.

During the programme, they became lead volunteers, taking on responsibilities for welcoming newcomers, making cups of tea, and offering a R-Urban Poplar Welcome to first-time attendees. To put it simply, they moved from outside (attendee) to within (R-Urban member), becoming programme hosts themselves through their newfound commitment derived within the co-design process. To co-learn is to fully engage within a CoP, to remove barriers to participation, to organise collectively and to share responsibilities with each other.

The co-design workshops created space for participants to not only suggest learning needs and desires but to share their own knowledge with others in the group by offering to host/design workshops for the civic learning programme (CC23). Co-design processes are spaces for legitimising situated knowledge(s) by creating a common platform in which knowledge(s) can be valorised through their contribution to collective processes (Petrescu et al., 2022). In this case, the process encouraged the group to 'become teachers', or the term used at R-Urban 'hosts', to share their existing skills and situated knowledge(s) with a wider public audience (further explored in Chapter 8). Five of the participating co-design group became workshop hosts, two for the very first time, reflecting a strong uptake within the group to share knowledge with others during the programme. The co-design process made space for this, encouraging participants to take on this new role, to recognise their existing skills and how their situated knowledge was relevant in addressing climate action and care.

7.5 Discussion on Co-designing Pedagogies with Learners

The following discussion is structured in two parts, first reflecting on the design tools and how they enabled a co-creative process, it then explores the different roles taken on by the author and wider co-design group.

7.5.1 Co-Design Tools

The success of the design process is embedded within the co-creative nature of the hub, as collaboration and sharing were already commonplace. This familiarity is significant in design-research contexts, as these spaces are well-versed in participatory methodologies which centre equity. Should the context have been more institutional, the outcome may have differed, and I would speculate less smoothly integrated. That is not to say that the process was not without its challenges. The first attempt at ‘co-design’ the ‘open-call’ was entirely unsuccessful, garnering no responses, which could be put down to a lack of familiarity with the concept, given that ‘open-calls’ are an academic or arts-based terminology. To address this, the second attempt followed a process of direct recruitment of existing participants who were passionate about the project. It is not, therefore, a self-selecting community, and the trust and relationalities within the group may not be easily replicated in other contexts.

The specific design tools helped foster trust and form caring relations within the group. The sharing of food cultures enabled a welcoming setting for further collaborative work which is important for overcoming social hierarchies. Their setting and the pace of action is important in improving accessibility with ‘non-expert’ designers, pointing to a slowness and care for participants. Co-design is about taking time, getting to know each other, building trust and as an outcome unexpected pathways open up. This slowness contrasts with institutional learning settings, with learning programmes having clearly defined timelines or research projects with fixed funded deadlines.

Co-mapping methods also help to provide ‘new visions’ (Huybrechts et al.,

2020) for the hub within the neighbourhood, visualising existing and new networks of actors and associations within the hub locality. Co-mapping supported more strategic thinking at a spatial level, identifying areas of investigation, intrigue, or places of civic learning for the programmes. The outcome of both workshops was a civic learning programme which more accurately reflected the local socio-physical context. It supported R-Urban in expanding its relational network of partners, groups, and alliances by physically linking up with other green space groups and civic associations. This design method also helped to move beyond individual learning desires to more open civic needs at the scale of the neighbourhood. Co-mapping is an effective tool in this setting; it has low barriers to entry and enables the sharing of situated perspectives and reflections on the neighbourhood. It also establishes a context for future actions, thinking towards wider neighbourhood transformations by first highlighting opportunities, curiosities, and possible allies.

7.5.2 Roles of Design(ers)

Whilst the co-design process facilitated the opening-up of R-Urban to new members, the roles equally evolved for the design-researcher. In this case, it was a movement from the very centre towards the edge, but still with a fundamental facilitating role. This is a reminder of Petrescu's text 'Losing control, keeping desire' (Blundell Jones, Petrescu and Till, 2005), recognising that in any participatory process, those who initiate must be confident in letting go, guiding the process and potentially stepping back and handing over to others. In this process, my experience started with its initiation, mediating and facilitating the co-design process towards the goal of trialling CP. This then shifted through the process, moving from designer to educator, and ultimately became a co-learner amongst others. The role of the design-researcher was to enable, to nurture existing capabilities, to relinquish control and 'make things happen' (Manzini 2014) as part of a new community of practice.

Co-design practitioners/researchers remain integral to the development of CP from the outset. Utilising 'designerly intent' (to set the objective and aim) and 'expert' capabilities (design literacy, cultures, and agency) to mobilise resources for future

pedagogy. The role of initiation is fundamental and recognises the agentic capacity of design as a catalyst for social innovations (Antaki and Petrescu, 2024). From a personal perspective, my experience working across the fields of design and education within architecture schools has put me in good stead for this process. Having the dual ‘capabilities’ to think from both a design and education perspective supported the opening-up of the process, recognising that sharing responsibilities (losing control) within the co-design group would ultimately lead to a more significant impact for those participating. Ultimately, the role of co-design initiator is a delicate balance to tread: setting a direction, trying to keep on course without restricting new voices, taking the project in unexpected and unplanned trajectories.

Through the coproduction of the CC programmes, co-learners’ roles within the process adapted, taking on new responsibilities and actions (promoters, facilitators, workshop hosts, etc). In essence, the co-design group moved from the periphery to the centre of R-Urban Poplar’s organisation and activities. The process concentrated participant involvement within R-Urban, catalysing new relations, forming a community of practice, and supporting many of this group to take on new responsibilities. The co-design process enabled participants to have ‘something at stake’ (Binder and Brandt, 2008), responding to personal learning needs and desires. It also raised ‘the stakes’ in creating collective opportunities to take on new roles and to share their knowledge, skills, and experience with others. This shift helps to recognise existing agency through the emancipatory potential of teaching and learning collectively (further explored in the next chapter). In simple terms, participants started as co-design participants, supported the co-curation of the process, and became co-learners and hosts, taking on new responsibilities throughout.

Co-design was an essential component in diversifying participation within R-Urban Poplar. In essence, the CoP facilitated a wider ‘opening up’ of the hub to new actors, knowledges and networks. This is consistent with previous experiences within R-Urban (Belfield and Petrescu, 2024), and the methods developed here support the aim for the hub to remain in formation, welcoming new members and groups to utilise their resources. Having regular ‘structured’ co-design workshops is good

practice to follow in community-led settings, allowing for the process to remain an 'open-ended conversation' but one moving forward with purpose (Manzini, 2015). R-Urban's 'openness' (see Chapter 6) to new directions of travel defined by this newly formed CoP was equally important to the success of CC. Without inclusivity and openness as core values governing the hub, it would be challenging to enable co-learners to take on such a variety of new roles and responsibilities. R-Urban is a space and group in which mobilised desires and needs can be supported; it provides a caring social infrastructure that can support future action.

7.6 Chapter Conclusion

In concluding this chapter on 'co-designing pedagogies with learners', the intention is to contribute to future design-research practices. In the case of CC, I distinguish between long-term co-creation and more strategically focused moments of co-design. Co-creation within CC and R-Urban unfolded over much longer durations than the specific festivals of learning, which resonates with existing literature framing as 'open-ended social conversations' (Manzini, 2015). This points to long, embedded relationships between 'expert and diffuse' designers to maximise their potential. Important, in this case, was R-Urban as a space that design agencies could materialise, through new roles and responsibilities. In the correct settings, extended co-creative process enable physical resources (e.g. urban commons, civic spaces, community gardens) to 'open-up' to new networks, members and groups. This opening-up is facilitated by the co-design workshops by sharing roles and responsibilities, allowing participants to move from the periphery to the centre of decision making. The groups and spaces in which civic pedagogies take place need to allow time for the unexpected and unplanned, as these design outcomes often materialise slowly, often outside the original scope and aim.

Equally important was my individual (designer) relationship to the hub, sustained through a weekly on-site presence¹⁶ and ongoing beyond the research timeframe. This 'situated design approach' requires maintenance, care, and constant checking-

¹⁶ Since 2020 I've ensured that Thursdays remain 'R-Urban site days' which enable me to be fully integrated into hub activities and governance meetings.

in with hub members in capacities beyond the design of pedagogies. For this reason, I believe critical spatial practitioners are well-placed to lead and initiate urgent pedagogies in contexts in which they are already embedded. Their skills as ‘urban curators’, critical thinkers, educators, and ‘designerly intent’ can mediate civic pedagogies and mobilise existing capabilities towards socio-ecological justice. My personal experience of this process has transformed my role as a design-educator, moving from initiating and facilitating the pedagogies towards becoming a co-learner within a CoP. This ‘losing control, yet keeping desire’ helps flatten hierarchies and supports collaborative work with hub members. Without taking steps to let go, unexpected design outcomes would never have materialised.

Despite this shift to wider co-creation and co-learning roles, it is important to stress that co-design workshops and tools were essential in enabling these outcomes. Co-design tools (mapping) supported a renewed focus on learning in relation to place, a simple, accessible format which supported wider network building and spatial thinking in the group. Having a pedagogic process punctuated frequently by co-design workshops would enable constant feedback loops, checking-in and iterations within a pedagogic process. The regret is that this co-design process was not more fully integrated from the outset to maximise the capacity of design as a social learning process. The failure of ‘open-call’ is a reminder of the need for translation when working with diffuse designers, establishing settings where trust could be formed between participants (discursive co-design dinners). Despite this limitation, structured co-design workshops and their settings became spaces to build relations, form trust, and establish needs between a committed co-learner group. This was integral in forming a meaningful CoP, which had reciprocity to act as a collective, taking ownership and responsibility for the pedagogic process. It is an example of designs capacity to initiate change by forming a community that is collectively motivated by action and learning.

8.0 Agency

8.1 Chapter Overview

This final discussion chapter centres on questions of ‘agency’ mobilised through civic pedagogy. Agency serves as a framework for understanding the ‘impact’ of the research process across three scales: the learner, R-Urban, and the neighbourhood.

There are two modes of agency which this thesis is concerned. First is the capacity for processes of emancipatory learning to nurture agency within participants. This stems from Giddens’s (1984) theorisation on the ability to act despite the constraints of surrounding society and power structures. Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015) make the case for learning and education in supporting the ‘achievement of agency’ across the ‘life course’, recognising the fluid nature that individuals have agency in certain contexts but not in others. In simple terms, the intention of CP is to realise potential agency within learners and to nurture the capability to act on and within the surrounding context. Outside of the individual, it has also been theorised from a collective and civic dimension, recognising the ability of groups to assemble and act together within the environment (Sara and Jones, 2017; Koskela and Paloniemi, 2023). This civic dimension is outlined by Forestiere (2015) as groups/collectives “thinking critically” and acting locally in realising change. The following findings support and elaborate on these two primary ways of understanding agency within learning (individually) and as a civic practice that transforms the urban environment.

The following sections present a series of findings based on interview transcripts, network mappings, and R-Urban outputs documented within the Practice Portfolio. The thesis presents a robust case, based on post-evaluation interview accounts, for civic pedagogies in fostering the ‘capability to act’ and demonstrating the ‘achievement of agency’ through peer teaching. The research then articulates how the R-Urban Hub enables collective transformation, serving as a space for collective action and fostering civic agency. It concludes by discussing the inverse relation, how the pedagogies themselves enabled the expansion of R-Urban toward the wider urban context, scaling networks and catalysing new initiatives as a demonstration

of the hub's collective agency. These findings are supported by document analysis, relational mappings, and auto-ethnographic observations and, therefore, remain more speculative, given the difficulty in empirically evidencing civic and urban transformations.

8.2 Peer Learning - Altering Habits of the Everyday

When discussing the impact of the CC programmes with participating learners, all responses highlighted the skills and knowledge learned, and how, to varying degrees of success, they continued to shape everyday life. Many reflections turned to the immediate spheres of the home and work for how they applied newly acquired knowledge. In this example from a co-design group participant and first-time workshop host, this was attributed to changing attitudes or 'mindset' for how to think and act within the world:

I've learnt so much, honestly. I can't even begin to say. My mindset has completely changed. Even though I knew how to do it was in me, but I wasn't quite active enough. I think I'm consciously doing a lot of things. Recycling, thinking about food waste, limiting food waste. Thinking about the way I grow things. Thinking about pesticides. Thinking about the composting. I think about it so much.

The emphasis here is on the duality of thinking and acting, recognising a newly activated consciousness which materialised through small actions, which contribute to the altering of certain 'habits' as outlined below:

When people come to this kind of programmes, everyone takes away something, but for myself, I've taken away so much. For me, the biggest thing is sustainability. Making sure there's no food waste. The food waste that used to happen in my house, the vegetables I used to buy, and then my husband's like, "Oh, this is gone up." [In Price] So finding ways to make sure that we are not limiting the food waste and we're composting being able to actively contribute

to. That for me is a huge thing in my household. I'm sure a lot of people are doing different things at homes because they're trying different things, and even changing my lifestyle around where I'm walking a lot more. Even limiting using my car. Changing the way my children and my family think about things. For me, I'm not just doing it, I'm doing it at work. I'm doing it with family. I'm doing it with my neighbours.

Interestingly, in this account and others, the impact of participation extended beyond the specificity of the workshop sessions and indicates a wider adoption of habits and lifestyles which are perceived as 'sustainable'. In no way did the CC programme specifically address car use and urban mobility, but the participant associates learning with a greater awareness of the benefits of less car-use and increased walking. It also captures how learning radiates beyond the individual experience, within families, with neighbours, and at work. This scaling beyond the individual demonstrates a certain degree of consciousness and a belief in lower-impact living, as well as a commitment to encouraging others within their social sphere. This reflection is emphasised in the focus group by R-Urban members, who described how the learning process has a 'legacy effect' that changes their experience of the everyday in unexpected ways:

Responder 2: It opens up their thinking to different things especially around sustainability and eco-friendly type of stuff but then it also-- I've seen it change how they act in their lives. People started composting, people are like, "Ugh, I don't like fruits and vegetables, but I'm going to try and grow it," and then all of a sudden, they are coming in with cupcakes and things and talking about they're growing whatever plant and then just sharing the knowledge, they're passing it on as well. It's having like a legacy effect.

...

Responder 1: It makes people feel good. Feel good and feel that they have the power, I think, or feel empowered maybe to do stuff, to take action and do things to take home with them, I think. That's often a thing. People are like, "Oh, I'm going to go try that at home." I like that.

This demonstrates a possible pathway for learners from: sceptic, to do'er, and then advocate, by first engaging in the adoption of small everyday habits and skills. This perhaps reflects a wider audience engagement and consciousness for urban sustainability and low-impact lifestyles, the development of a 'critical' spark by questioning existing norms and valuing what the individual can directly control. Several participants discussed the influence of the pedagogy on the individual, as this is the realm we have most direct "control over". The following interview extract, from a co-design group member and regular attendee, highlights the frustration of engaging with sustainability within the workplace versus the immediacy of climate learning for the self:

I think it's actually probably quite effective with some of the skills or the knowledge learned here, because it makes it very tangible. It's those little elements where I feel like those are at least, the things we have control over. I saw that in my last job and it's like these big topics, and if we completely change the infrastructure or move to renewable energy, it just feels like what part can I really play in this process? Those things, its maybe little things, but it all adds up. Also, that consciousness, well, those are little things, then they lead maybe to something else.

It demonstrates the complexity of addressing our climate emergency; learners often felt empowered to learn new skills and acquire knowledge which could directly be assimilated in their personal capacity, altering habits, incorporating new skills, and changing mindsets. What is perceived as more complex is how to address the question of scale e.g., climate adaption within national energy systems, greening urban infrastructures, etc. The CP were effective at working within the personal but limited in how the knowledge acquired may address systemic change. This was something the programmes both struggled with. Whilst taking action within R-Urban was possible, acting in the neighbourhood was more difficult. To develop wider civic actions, programmes would need to be sustained over much longer durations, which is reflected later in this chapter when discussing the evolution of the R-Urban hub. What the pedagogies did seem effective in was developing a consciousness within

learners for sustainability in broad terms through the development of knowledge and skills, which were often most immediately brought to life in the realm of personal and family life. The ‘legacy effect’ of civic pedagogies is most keenly felt in learners’ ability to re-shape their personal habits, attitudes, and understanding—a consciousness that could lead to further civic action but without guarantee.

8.3 The Empowering Nature of ‘Hosting’

The CC programmes created opportunities for learners to become teachers or the term used at R-Urban ‘hosts’ of workshops. This was particularly evidenced in CC23, with four members of the curriculum co-design process hosting workshops. In most cases these workshops focussed on existing passions and interests (sharing Bangla food cultures, bees and their role in urban biodiversity, propagating herbs). For the most part, session hosts were sharing knowledge and skills developed through self-acquired expertise within a subject area. In some cases, this was knowledge derived through tacit doing (e.g., horticultural knowledge) or situated knowledge of experience (e.g., sharing recipes passed down within a family). One participant in CC22 and host in CC23 highlighted the importance of teaching and learning as a dialogue, a constant process of going in-between, demonstrating understanding of a topic to the extent that you have something to share, but remaining open to always learning more about the subject:

That's how I like to learn more things. By teaching, I feel that I learn a lot more as well because I need to know everything in order to teach, but then by teaching, you get questions, you're like, "Oh, okay. I didn't know about that. All right, then let me go and check it out," and then you check it out, you think, "Oh, wow. Okay, now I can go and teach that." [laughter] So, yes, it's not just you as a teacher giving to the students. You get a lot as well. It's two-way. It's amazing.

In chapters five and six, I highlighted the role of conviviality in the learning environment, both being a space to experiment, fail, and ultimately a safe space so

that understanding can be co-constructed in dialogue between learners and hosts. This relaxed and joyful setting helps to moderate expectations on the host, making the learning process a collective exercise rather than a hierarchical banking mode of education where knowledge is deposited. For one co-design group member, this was their first time acting as a host, something that they acknowledged, *‘never had the courage to do it myself’*:

To be able to do that [Speaking about Bengali Pickle and Preserve Making Workshop cc23], I felt like I was doing something for my mum. I was living my nan's memories and it felt really empowering. It felt really good.

For this host, sharing situated knowledges passed down through generations was an empowering process. Equally, R-Urban members during the focus group perceived the role of civic learning within the hub as developing the confidence to share newly acquired knowledge directly with others (families, friends, colleagues), which helps to scale the impact of the pedagogy:

Responder 3: I feel like it's giving confidence maybe for some people that comes. It's not that they learn everything. Not everything is new to them, maybe something that they already had a lot of knowledge on or they carry that in themselves but maybe they felt a bit alone. Now I feel like they feel more robust to embody that maybe with their friends, family, or whatever. They feel maybe a bit more confident, feel that they can pass on some of the skills.

Other learners reflected on how they adopted the role of advocate, sharing knowledge acquired within R-Urban with others. This can be seen as a scaling of the learning beyond the hub, with learners becoming ‘advocates’ in aiming to raise awareness with neighbours and friends, as described by a co-design group participant and regular workshop attendee:

Or even just to spark or to create that spark for some of the discussions

because I definitely feel like after the workshops then I would have topics that I then discuss with friends or where I might say, "why are you still using that cleaning product"? There's really a simple way to do things or like with the bats as well. I think I've been talking to everyone about that, and then it creates at least an awareness with other people. Then you think, oh, now I heard this maybe I look into it as well or bringing friends along to the workshops here. Or I think I also dropped leaflets with my neighbours so that at least people start a conversation.

One aspect highlighted was the role of confidence in having the capacity to host. According to R-Urban members, confidence was derived from being both 'sociable' and 'stubborn' but primarily derived from having detailed knowledge of the topic. When asking one learner if they'd like to host a workshop, their hesitation was grounded in a questioning of if they were 'confident enough', and how a lack of confidence could be overcome by hosting in collaboration with someone else in the group. One participant during CC22 reflected on their own capability to teach others being derived in a deep understanding of the topic:

It's realizing, okay, how much do you know, really know. You test yourself and actually think, "Okay." I think that's what gives you the confidence, without knowing a bit, you can't really do the workshops. I think my aims with the workshops is for those that come to the workshops to be able to do their own workshops because it means that they've learned and have that confidence to go and do their own things as well.

It also reinforces the empowering nature of teaching/hosting as perceived by those who ran the programme. The aim is to empower further participants to become 'confident enough' to contribute to a collective learning process, one in which all are teachers and advocates for climate action and low-impact living.

8.4 Expanding Relational Networks and Alliances

The R-Urban hub was an integral part of the learning process, as this urban common enabled space for action, both within and outside the hub's boundary. Most directly, the CC programmes had an impact on R-Urban (as a place and its members) through expanded audiences, building new networks and forming alliances with other local organisations. When discussing what was different about the CC programme to other R-Urban programming, focus group members highlighted the curriculum co-design and outreach being important for the hub:

Responder 4: In terms of like we drew in a different crowd, I felt like. Our reach was further. Obviously, we focused on the community, but it reached further out and drew people in from all over London. Yes, so I really felt that. Yes, it was definitely different in that way.

Facilitator: Why do you think that was?

Responder 2: I think because we created a series around more than what we were doing as well, and then it had everything smoothly connected together, so it felt like a series as opposed to stand-alone workshops.

Responder 3: You invited other people as well, like you had maybe more people from other organisations that brought their crowd a bit maybe. I don't know. It's weird, it's strange actually.

Responder 2: More partner involvement as well. Across partners.

Responder 3: The program, I think you're right, the program was key. It was attracting people more widely.

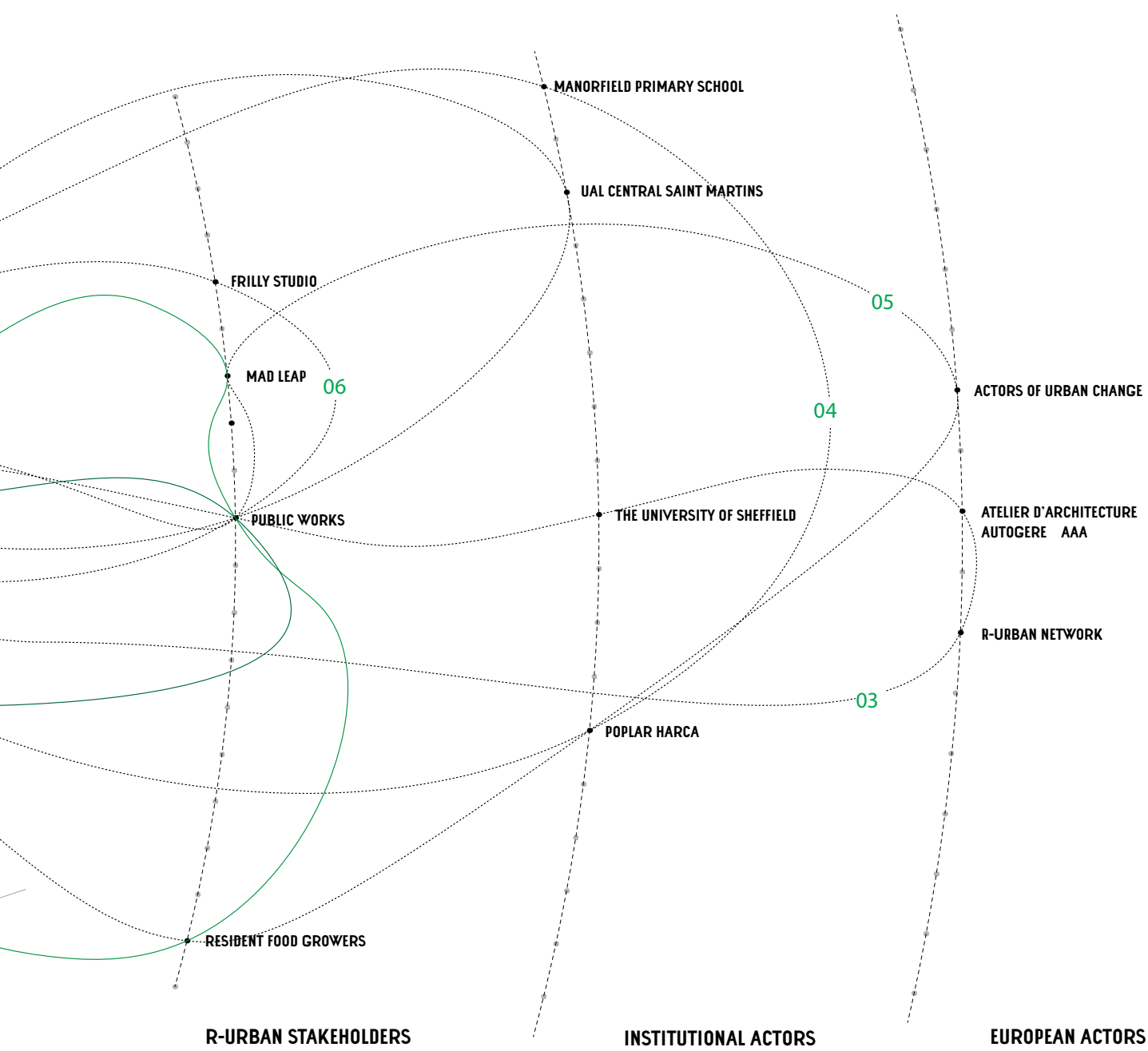
CC were moments of intensity, centralising a learning programme into a shorter time with stronger curatorial focus. This concentration of resources facilitated the widening of audience reach by raising stakes and R-Urban members investing more energy into outreach than the regular weekly programming (flyer drops, in person networking with local community centres, inviting collaborator networks). As outlined in Chapter 6, this is an essential aspect of urban commons in their need to remain porous to new members and prevent enclosure. The pedagogies have a catalysing effect on the hub; through their co-production, they expand audience

RELATIONAL NETWORKS

- 01 - Youth Engagement Network
- 02 - Just Food and Climate Transition
- 03 - R-Urban European Network
- 04 - Tower Hamlets Air Quality Network
- 05 - Anaerobic Digester and Food Systems
- 06 - Hub Construction



Figure 190 - R-Urban Relationscape 2021

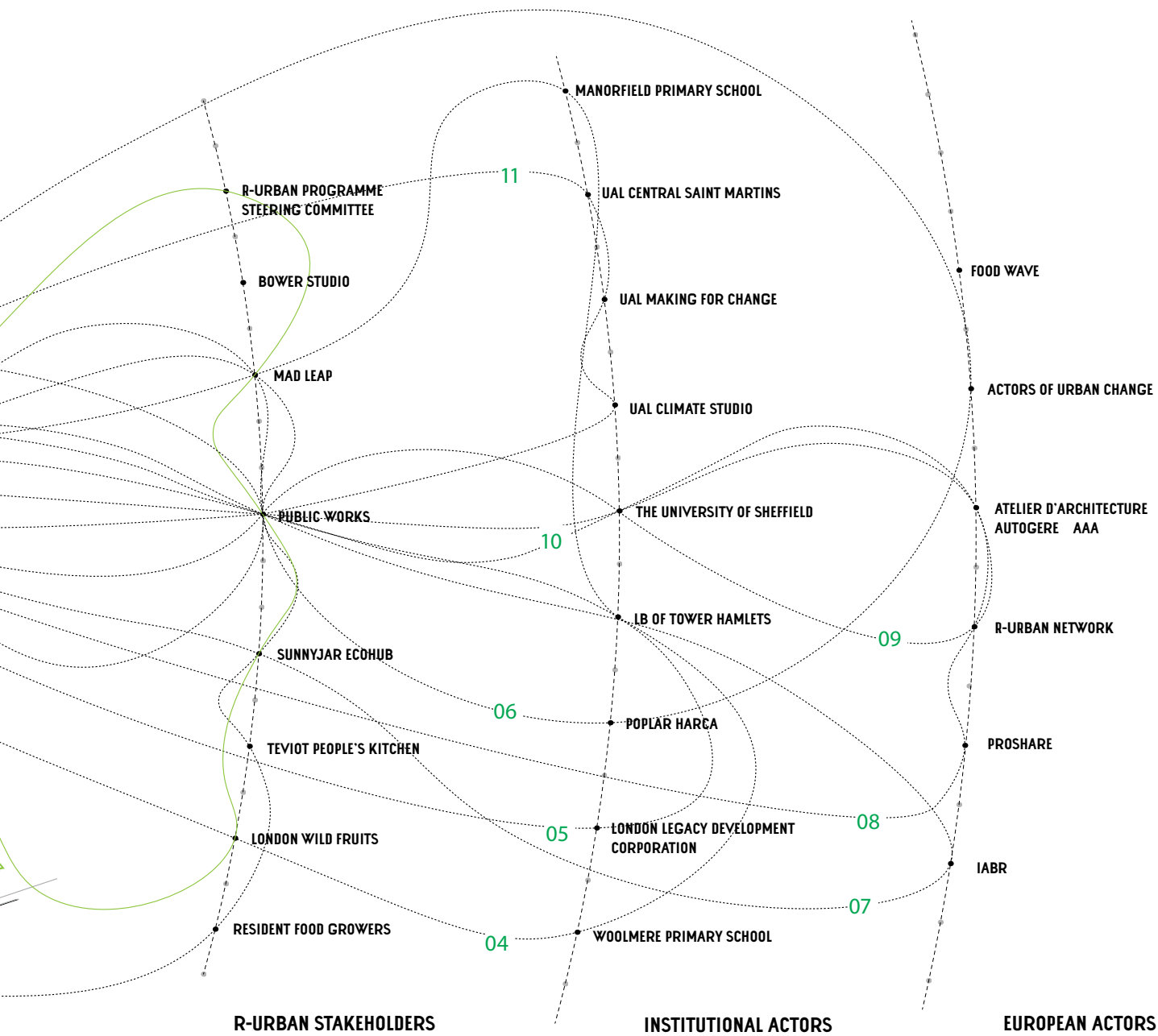


RELATIONAL NETWORKS

- 01 - Youth Engagement Network
- 02 - Just Food and Climate Transition
- 03 - Climate Companions Project
- 04 - Bug Club Project
- 05 - SOURCE Local Food System Project
- 06 - Actors of Urban Change Network
- 07 - International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam
- 08 - ProSHARE Research Living Lab
- 09 - R-Urban Network
- 10 - WRDTP Post Graduate Research Position
- 11 - Climate Studio Project



Figure 191 - R-Urban Relationscape 2024



participation and diversity, building local networks through the programmatic focus on the neighbourhood of Poplar. The following relational mapping (Figures 190 and 191) compares the R-Urban network at two points 2021 and 2024 (before and after the pedagogies). Firstly, when comparing the differences between each map, the intensity of connections and the number of actants within the network is clearly intensified in 2024. This is not solely down to the pedagogy, however, following the green map line, you can clearly see the intensity of R-Urban and Local Partners who were linked through CC.

These new relations have been sustained beyond the pedagogies, with many local partners now regularly collaborating on new programmes or directly within R-Urban. Two organisations who connected through the CC programme (London Wild Fruits¹⁷ and SunnyJar Eco Hub¹⁸) are now fully embedded partner organisations within R-Urban. Both organisations make use of office/storage spaces on site for their enterprises and, in exchange for rent, contribute to free public learning programmes around wild foods and low-waste living. This ‘exchange economy’ of the hub continues to thrive as more groups and citizens become members of the hub. The relations started through CC continue at present. Having space and resources in the hub was important in enabling further action. By embedding these organisations, R-Urban expanded its relational economy, allowing it to thrive with less dependency on the precarious nature of grant funding¹⁹.

The relational mapping in 2024 also highlights a significant increase in local, institutional, and European stakeholders from the 2021 baseline. The CC programmes did not directly address any institutional or European partners besides the University of Sheffield, but these networks multiplied during the 3 years via new collaborations. The CC programmes directly partnered with and linked up

17 London Wild Fruits teaches about wild foods and foraging in the London area. The CC programme was the first time R-Urban and LWF were connected and have since collaborated on many learning programmes and events.

18 SunnyJar EcoHub are a not-for-profit social enterprise who teach skills around low-waste living in cities. Their mission is to make sustainable living affordable for all. They have been collaborators with R-Urban as part of the local JustFACT project since 2020, they moved to R-Urban in February 2023 and this the base of their organisation.

19 The R-Urban project continues to apply for grant funding for public programmes and capital works improvements, but a base level of operation of the hub is done in-kind or by self-organised groups.

with thirteen local organisations and civic groups, with ten continuing as allies through new projects via partnerships and other justice networks, e.g., the Tower Hamlets Food Partnership. With most of these, the pedagogy became a way of forming a direct relation, by visiting their community spaces or by inviting groups to host workshops during the curriculum. The programme was an opportunity to be generous with resources, paying these groups for their time and, in exchange, widening their audiences. The workshops provided a space for relationship and alliance building, fostering companionship in the neighbourhood. Importantly, the open-ended nature of R-Urban enabled these new relations to be sustained after the pedagogies through new programmes, events or by sharing resources. This is significant, as the informal network needs ongoing reproduction and maintenance, which is now facilitated by R-Urban members. The success of the hub is partially due to the fluidity of who can be involved or benefit from its infrastructures. When interviewing an artist and workshop host in CC22, they remarked on the expansive nature of the network:

I was just thinking it is interesting-- I don't remember what the contexts are, but people know about R-Urban and when I have brought it up sometimes people like, "Oh, I know this person." Or like, "Yes, this is how I'm related to it." What I'm saying with that is that-- Actually, there is an interesting network of people that have formed through the ages. Obviously, it has been running for a while. We're a new addition to your network of people, but it'd be really cool to unite them.

These expanded networks demonstrate the allyship within the neighbourhood and the density of grassroots groups and enterprises working with social and environmental transitions. The strength of this network is an active representation of the collective agency shared, a way of standing in solidarity with local justice struggles. The pedagogy was a moment in time which catalysed civic networks around the R-Urban hub, in exchange, the hub continues to be widely accessed and share resources with other groups.

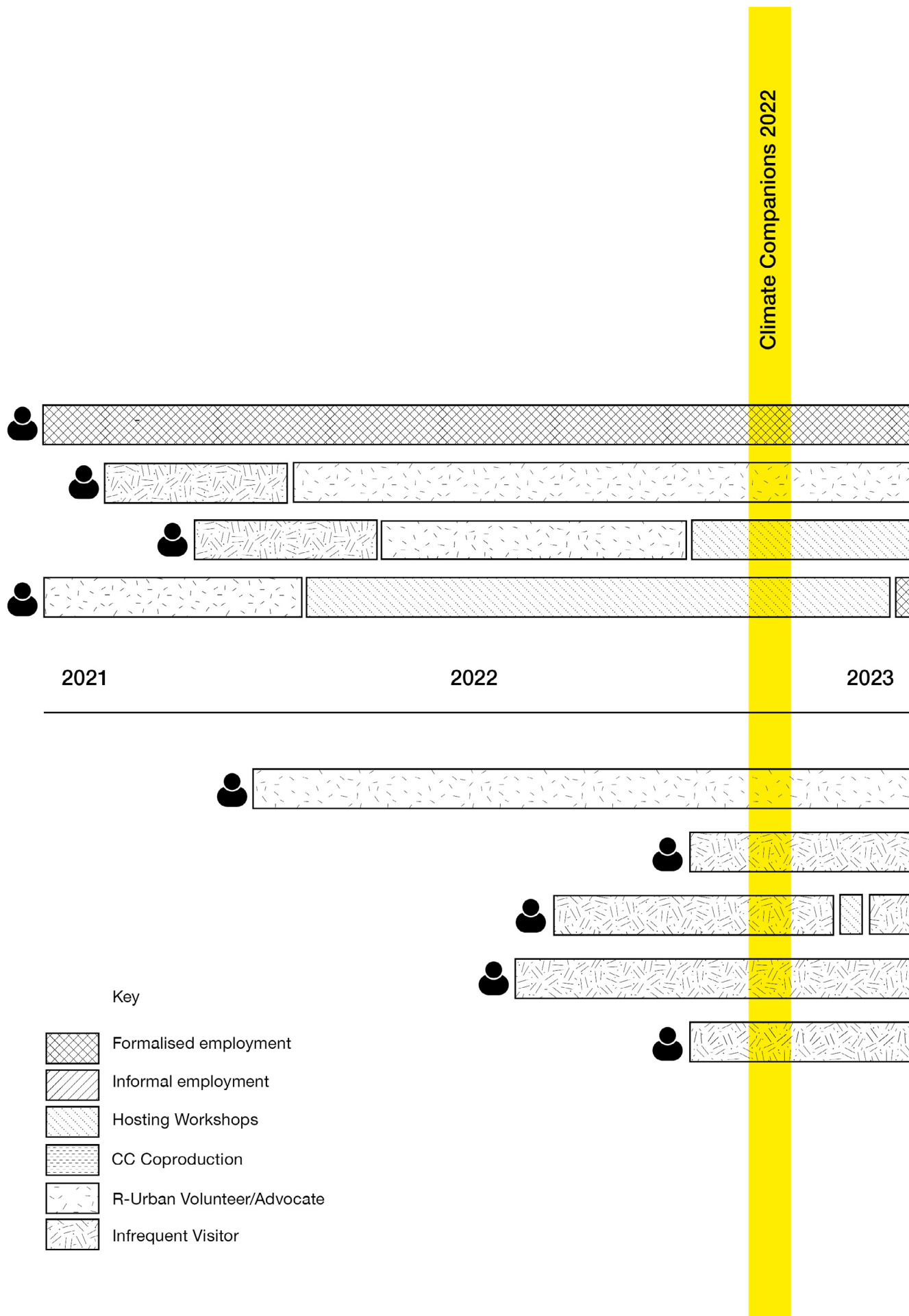


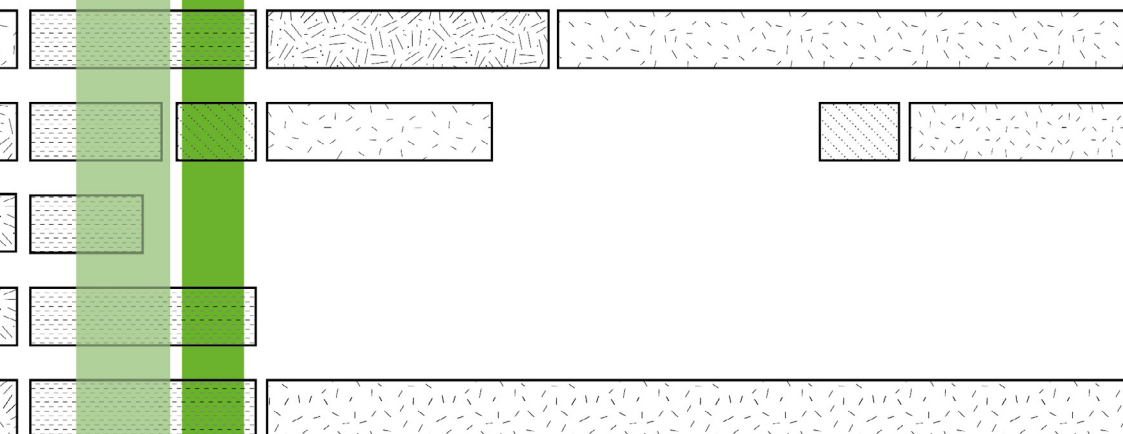
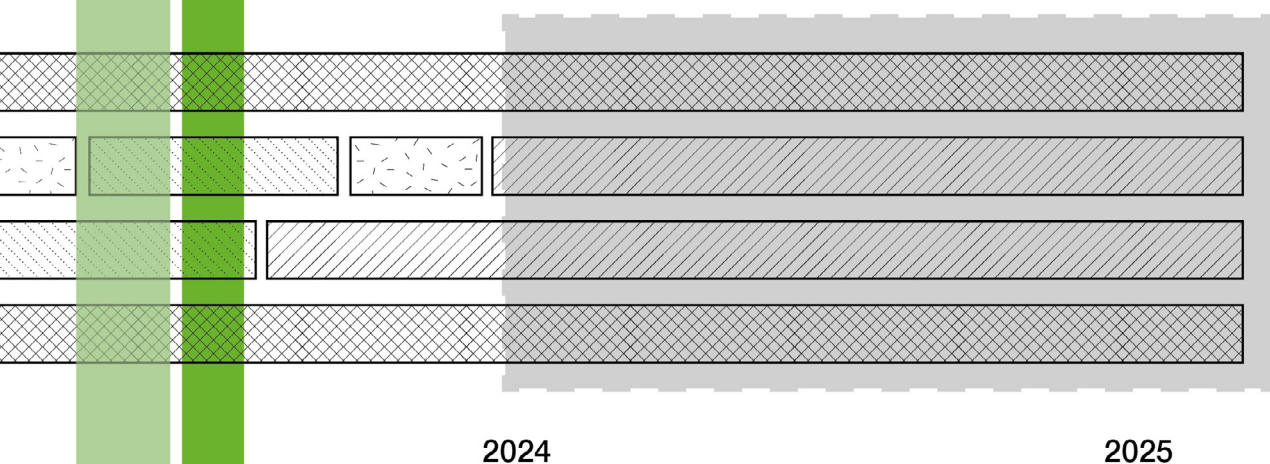
Figure 192 - Co-Design groups changing roles within R-Urban

Curriculum
Co-Design 2023

Climate Companions 2023

Centre of R-Urban
Poplar Governance

Teviot People's Kitchen Cooperative



Periphery
of R-Urban Poplar
Governance

8.5 Catalysing New Roles and Initiatives

Beyond expanding relational networks across the neighbourhood and with institutions, the CC programme also supported the expansion of new roles and initiatives directly within R-Urban. In the case of CC, the project co-design group has, in some cases, become centrally involved in the organisation and public programming of the hub. Figure 192 plots the co-design groups' changing roles through the duration of the research process and beyond. It highlights individual journeys from 'infrequent visitor' to 'formal employment' and the different roles within this scale.

Seven of the co-design group remain closely involved through formal employment (two), three through informal paid work as workshop or programme facilitators, one as a regular garden volunteer and four as part of a new cooperative organisation. Within the hub, finding ways of resourcing employment via grant funds or training programmes has been an important new direction, making low-impact living the everyday and supporting their families in the process. One participant now works 20 hours per week as a 'Circular Food Coordinator', working at R-Urban running a weekly green skills volunteering session and training people in organic, no-dig and permaculture growing methods. New roles as workshop facilitators have emerged as informal employment for three of the steering group. One is employed intermittently to facilitate a weekly afterschool 'Bug Club' for children aged 7-11, providing access and engagement with nature (see [Portfolio page 300](#)). This project is funded via Tower Hamlets School Superzones²⁰ and provided further paid workshop opportunities for a second former participant to teach children about pollinators and urban growing. Informal employment has also been fundraised for a further participant to cater a weekly free community lunch, cooking healthy vegan meals for regular volunteers and anyone in need locally. These informal employments require constant fundraising, which is managed by public works on behalf of R-Urban, as they hold an established track record with funders.

²⁰ School Superzones are funded by the Greater London Authority, in their words, "School Superzones are place-based interventions around schools in areas of the greatest disadvantage. They aim to protect children's health and enable healthy behaviours through the place-shaping powers of Local Authorities and local partnership working. <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/health-and-wellbeing/school-superzones>

To move beyond this pre-existing relationship and create a new enterprise for opportunities at R-Urban and beyond, four members of the co-design steering group are now part of a new cooperative embedded within R-Urban, the Teviot People's Kitchen (TPK) (see Portfolio pages 308-309). TPK has a broad focus around local food justice, overseeing any food related workshops at R-Urban, expanding on previous learnings within the group. The co-op at time of writing are still in their infancy, undertaking training in food hygiene, first aid and gaining support in cooperative models. In total there are 5 members of the cooperative, with a further session facilitator of the CC23 programme becoming member. This is a shift within R-Urban, with this new women-led group taking on hub responsibilities for food related site programming, handing-over responsibilities from public works to this new group.

The CC programme was vital in establishing this new initiative, providing the relations and motivations to assemble a new group with a shared interest in food justice and climate transition. CC23 and the co-design process played an important role in building trusting relations in the group, supporting them to act and gain the confidence required for this new collaboration. The pedagogic experience of co-learning and co-designing together was significant in first building alliances within the CoP, which is now sustained through the new cooperative. It is an opportunity to cement these newly explored roles and responsibilities within R-Urban whilst diversifying the curatorial voice of current hub programming. This shift of roles and new citizen members taking on new responsibilities is a manifestation of their collective agency.

Since the CC programmes, the R-Urban Hub has continued to expand its reach to new participants, reaching over 800 people through programmes of weekly climate learning in 2024. This increase in participation is due to an expansion of the weekly workshop programming at the hub. In 2024, the site was animated by workshops primarily on Thursdays and Fridays covering green skills, repairs and upcycling, sharing food cultures, after-school nature clubs and habitat building (See Portfolio pages 301-305). Alongside new organisations, the hub became the informal home

of further local food justice initiatives, such as the SOURCE project, which is steered by R-Urban partner organisation MAD LEAP. This project supports R-Urban by increasing food waste recycling capacity (via Anaerobic Digestion and Composting) and built a Mushroom Farm, to grow affordable local food. In essence, the hub becomes a concentrating location for climate and neighbourhood action. It provides a free space and resources in which partners, collaborators and informal members can put their collective energy into action, a space in which they can nurture their civic agency.

Civic Agency within the neighbourhood is difficult to empirically correlate to the CC programme; however, it was a catalytic moment. As a direct follow-on, R-Urban and public works were invited by Poplar HARCA to contribute to a GLA Climate Resilience funded green space strategy called 'Poplar Green Futures' (see Portfolio pages 314-315). This development funding has enabled R-Urban to lead a programme of stakeholder engagement and climate learning in collaboration with a landscape architect to collaboratively re-think open-green spaces on housing estates. This example has engaged a wider network of HARCA residents in the co-design of existing green spaces under the framing of climate resilience. The associated learning programme involved many of the CC network and used similar methods: urban exploration, community planting actions and case study visits; to help build the capacity within the residents' co-design group. This process ran for 12 months from October 2023 to September 2024 and is now looking for further capital funding to transform three sites in Poplar to increase climate resilience and biodiversity. Although not a direct outcome of the CC programme, this project has been shaped and influenced by the network and through the methods of civic and climate learning developed at R-Urban.

Poplar Green Futures is emblematic of the growing network and agency of the R-Urban project, applying methods developed within the hub to wider publics at the scale of the neighbourhood. This is one of several projects being explored in 2024-25, which start to look beyond the singular hub to further replication or scaling in Poplar and Tower Hamlets. Another example is the work being carried out by public

works on 'Reimagining Teviot Centre – Scoping Study. This work envisions potential synergies between local organisations and maps out possible scenarios for the future of an existing community centre. Whilst, this is not directly tied to the pedagogies, it does suggest a wider civic agency being cultivated by the R-Urban hub and its members by working towards long-term visions for the future.

This is important in scaling ambition towards wider scales of concern. R-Urban is envisioned as a network of eco-civic hubs; the collective agency of the method is reflected in the proliferation of new hubs in the city. In Chapter 6, I outlined how R-Urban acts as a 'space of demonstration' for low-impact circular design, prototypes and, most importantly, ways of governing urban resources. The agency of the hub is therefore reflective of its reach outwards to the neighbourhood, toward new districts and cities to maximise its transformative potential. A network of resilience hubs scales the impact beyond the neighbourhood, as evidenced by the R-Urban Paris, which functions at both the neighbourhood and metropolitan scale (Belfield and Petrescu, 2024). When reflecting on the 'impact' of R-Urban, one member of the co-design group and regular attendee, linked the current hub to the work happening on the GGE project as a possible scaling action:

I guess to accomplish with that great green estate. On a small level, it's first creating all these ideas or seeing all these things and then it's the 'so what' or 'what next now thing', and then extracting the important bits and then implementing that somewhere.

This account suggests that there is a significant 'potential agency' within R-Urban which would be generated through its replication (of hubs, methods and values) in new contexts. It indicates a degree of civic agency that is already established, through the hubs growing influence on local spatial planning, however, it is by no means is fully realised at present.

8.6 Discussion on the Agency of Civic Learning

This discussion first addresses agency within learning and peer-teaching, before unpacking the forms of civic and collective agency catalysed through the process. It answers **RQ3: To what extent can co-designed civic pedagogies enable greater agency in learners? In what ways does this [agency] contribute to socio-spatial transformation?**

8.6.1 Nurturing the Capability to Act

To better understand agency from an anthropocentric view, it is helpful to understand the interrelation of ‘capability’ and ‘action’. In ‘Development as Freedom’, Amartya Sen (2001) reframes capability as the expansion of freedom that should be seen as both the ‘means’ and ‘end’ goal of development (p.36)²¹. He argues,

‘Capability is thus a kind of freedom: the substantive freedom to achieve alternative functioning combinations (or, less formally put, the freedom to achieve various lifestyles)’ (2010, p.75)

In my mind, the notion of ‘capability’ and ‘freedom’ are inherently linked to the concept of agency. As outlined by Biesta and Tedder (2007), agency, like ‘freedom’, is inherently linked to social structures, and the ability to act ‘otherwise’. Perhaps in our ‘capability’ to act that we can understand ‘development as freedom’ in projects of emancipatory learning. The pedagogies intent is to nurture one’s capability to act, despite constraining or limiting structures of society, through empowering processes of learning that open-up freedoms that were previously obscured.

Within CC, learners demonstrated a newfound consciousness of low-impact and sustainable lifestyles through the knowledge shared and enacted within the

²¹ Capability is an emergent concept within the process, something retrospectively and reflexively that has shaped the thinking of this final chapter. It is therefore an area of literature and thinking which needs further exploration as identified in Chapter 9 – Conclusions and Contributions.

pedagogy. Incorporating new habits into everyday rituals is one example. However, learners advocating for low-impact and sustainable choices to others reflects the capability to act beyond constraining societal structures and the self.

In this case, CP gave learners the knowledge, skills and confidence to reclaim some personal (limited) control over the climate emergency. Whilst this altering of habits is limited in global impact (and resolutely not the answer to tackling a systemic and global crisis), it demonstrates an important ‘freedom’ achieved through the pedagogy. In describing the aim of the Eco-Nomadic School, the authors summarised its intention as ‘Learning to Act’, learning to transform the future through action, by exchanging and sharing situated knowledges as a radical learning commons (Bohm, James and Petrescu, 2018, p. 9). It was an example of a ‘diverse pedagogy’ which acted across Europe supporting the development of agency through learning, providing the knowledge and skills towards action, by transforming the everyday (2018). It is in this vein, in ‘preparing the ground for action’ (Caris and Cowell, 2016), that we can see the learning within CC. I would argue these ‘small acts’ contribute to a wider political consciousness which has greater transformative potential (beyond the pedagogy), developing advocates and activists for climate struggles. In this case, starting with the immediate context and developing knowledge ‘to act’ within the everyday was a first step towards more significant agencies.

These new habits, skills and knowledge contribute towards individual ‘learning in the life course’ (Biesta and Tedder, 2007). This situated and embodied knowledge helps to raise consciousness, but also gives some immediate actions that can be taken, which allow participants to reclaim control over aspects of their personal lives (even if limited in their transformative potential). It should be noted that the study is limited through its small sample size and doesn’t aim to generalise, instead pointing to possible pathways for future pedagogies through this case. The research also faced challenges in trying to evaluate what is perceived as an academic discourse (agency) with participants who were less familiar with the term. Given a limited understanding of the concept, the interviews focused more directly on

learners reflecting on the 'impact' of the pedagogy on themselves and within the neighbourhood . The findings present a relatively limited scale of impact (number of interviewees). However, I would argue that we can see these small actions and individual responses as 'achievement towards agency' in these specific cases. This acknowledges that the pedagogies supported co-learning 'towards' a final goal of civic action, but for many participants who are no longer embedded within R-Urban, stopped short of realising 'agency as achievement'.

I would argue that the CP are a gateway towards wider activism and neighbourhood action, the first step towards political bodies acting together rather than alone. By learning in collective settings, barriers in access to knowledge are overcome, learning how to be within a community of practice directly supports its agentic capability. The CC programme nurtured a partially forgotten or overlooked civic resilience within co-learners, and it supported them in re-engaging sustainable transitions in domestic, work, and civic settings. I would argue that CP (such as this one) contribute the knowledge, skills, and desire to create such alternatives. They are the gateway towards wider political awakening, acting first on the everyday (within the home or neighbourhood) before turning towards projects of wider systemic change. CP support citizens in nurturing their agentic capability towards this movement, by working together, and collectively creating radically inclusive learning spaces in which we can 'learn to act'. To support the broader goals of sustainable transitions to net-zero, green economies, and living within planetary boundaries, citizens must first engage with their everyday realities. This form of hands-on, situated pedagogy can contribute towards this visioning project by taking initial steps towards agency.

8.6.2 Agency through Peer-Teaching

Within CC the act of 'hosting' and 'teaching' others was an important facet of the learning process for the co-design steering group. This process begins with 'advocacy' with friends, neighbours and family in sharing knowledge with others to advocate for change (to lifestyles, to adopt less harmful practices, to campaign etc). This often begins in familiar and safe surroundings but, in some cases, was nurtured toward wider audiences through the act of 'teaching' others via workshops hosted at R-Urban.

Becoming a workshop 'host' or 'teacher' is significant for several reasons. First, it demonstrates a degree of confidence within the co-learner to put themselves and their knowledge 'out there' to strangers or unfamiliar audiences. Confidence was identified as an integral part of becoming a host, without which the possibility of being a host or teacher was not possible. Second, it demonstrates a deep understanding of the topic, in some cases developed through tacit and embodied learning, and in others through situated experiences. Confidence, in most cases, was derived from this deep understanding of the topic, or at a minimum, a willingness to teach others despite acknowledging a 'partial' understanding of the topic. It supported 'hosts' in valorising this knowledge (which was perhaps historically overlooked in institutional learning arenas) by giving it a platform and the support of the hub's resources in bringing it to a public audience. Third, it indicates the critical consciousness in the subject and capability to act otherwise despite limitations and constraints of societal structures, particularly women from diverse backgrounds.

The 'act of teaching others' demonstrates the 'achievement of agency' (Biesta and Tedder 2007), the capability to act otherwise in support of an ecological transition in which they can play a small part. It reflects the empowering nature of learning and teaching, recognising its integral role in the 'development of freedom'. Becoming R-Urban 'Host' indicates a significant transition for some learners, an empowering journey demonstrating their achievement.

8.6.3 The Hub Enables Civic Agency

I would argue that the hub setting for the CP was integral to the cultivation of civic agency in Poplar. Without designated and designed spaces of climate and civic resilience, the CC programme would have had a limited impact on an urban level. CP need a centralising and geographic locus for the activity and learning. Communities need to physically assemble through the collective learning experience to form relations, ties, and networks. This CoP is situated and tied to a physical location, the neighbourhood where they live and work. R-Urban Poplar enabled this, a space which was porous to newcomers and inclusive (see Chapter 6); the role of the hub is central to forming strong social bonds which have the potential to be transformational on an urban scale.

Civic agency is defined as a ‘collective’ and ‘relational’ practice in which groups assemble to take action together (Sara and Jones, 2017; Koskela and Paloniemi, 2023). The hub acts as a condenser of relations and networks, a space which is generous and can incorporate multiple stakeholders from a range of institutions simultaneously. It seems important that such spaces of civic learning enable a CoP to form through the pedagogy and then subsequently enable them to act by sharing its resources. This is most directly evidenced by the formation of the Teviot People’s Kitchen initiative because of their participation in the co-design of CC. In this instance, the R-Urban hub supported this new CoP towards new roles and employment as an unplanned outcome of the pedagogies. The hub was a space in which this new group could act collectively within a supportive ecosystem with a shared interest in food cultures and justice.

I believe it is often the ‘what do we do next?’ question that limits potential civic agency in education settings. Having spaces within cities where groups are free to act, organise and mobilise collective agencies towards sustainable transitions is essential in scaling their impact. Without this, pedagogic focus naturally moves toward personal development rather than collective actions, which can cause group energies to dissipate. For CP to be impactful, group agencies need to be mobilised

towards transformative action directly within the host group, urban common or institution. This indicates the role of 'host spaces' and their governance frameworks in further supporting co-learners beyond the pedagogy, a factor best designed into the curricula from the outset²².

8.6.4 Civic Agency Transforms the Hub (and the Neighbourhood)

The expansion of the relational network (2021-24) who contribute to the R-Urban hub (post-curriculum) is testament to the civic agency of the collective group who steer it. New self-organised initiatives (Teviot People's Kitchen), new hub enterprises (SunnyJar and London Wild Fruits) and continued civic learning programmes are representative of the capability of the expanded collective that governs the hub resources. In this case, CP catalysed the transformation of the existing hub to reach new audiences and transform the day-to-day of R-Urban by expanding the pool of organisations and citizens who govern it.

More recently (2023-24), this action has moved beyond the hub towards the neighbourhood via new projects which sought R-Urban 'expertise' in developing climate-resilient visions of the future neighbourhood. CP were a factor in this increased agency of the collective project, their success in 2022 and 2023 leading to the commissioning of new civic learning programmes and co-design support for Poplar Green Futures. The expanded reach beyond projects within the hub is representative of the transformative potential of the process. It is also seen within the strength of local solidarity networks around climate and food justice. These networks operate at a metropolitan scale, beyond Poplar, and open up opportunities for wider collective action around climate struggles, for example, campaigning to the local government about food justice and support for precarious community organisations.

²² This was not apparent from the outset of the CC Programme and few resources were allocated towards enabling new civic agencies to be mobilised within the hub. Due to the fluidity of hub governance and new opportunities emerging the R-Urban hub has managed to maintain this energy. If reconducting this research again I would place much greater emphasis on the 'collective action' outcomes of the pedagogy.

Civic learning first mobilises communities around climate action within the neighbourhood; this agency is enacted through the reproduction of R-Urban, which, in turn, catalyses the expansion of the R-Urban agenda to a wider neighbourhood. Whilst this work is still in progress and difficult to empirically evidence ‘urban transformation’, it highlights the potential of such learning processes embedded within urban commons or projects of neighbourhood re-imagining. Ultimately, The R-Urban Poplar hub enables learners to move beyond individual agency and toward civic values. It has become a collective space for citizens enacting a more just and resilient neighbourhood, a space to take action and influence future visions of the neighbourhood.

8.7 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has explored the agentic dimensions of embedded civic and climate learning during the research. ‘Agency’ was a key research outcome given its interrelation with everyday life, in education settings, and within spatial practice. The research highlighted three forms of agency that were nurtured through CC: first, in developing capabilities ‘towards agency’; second, by embodying the achievement of agency through teaching; and finally, in materialising civic agency through the R-Urban hub. This points to a series of learnings which extend theorisation and practice.

It further reinforces the role of the ‘spaces of civic learning’ as integral to effective civic pedagogies. The duality of the hub and neighbourhood as the space in which action can be taken enables collective agencies to form and supports learners move beyond the self. Without the hub’s resources, networks, and members, it would be harder to mobilise new (learnt) capabilities towards action at the scale of the neighbourhood. Whilst CC had wide reach in audience numbers, only a small percentage (the co-design group) and a handful of other regular volunteers transitioned towards enacting civic agency within the hub. This highlights that perhaps reaching smaller groups of co-designers-learners, working more intensively,

critically, over longer durations, may have increased the overall agentic capability on an urban scale.

Embedding civic pedagogies within eco-civic hubs makes space for potential civic agencies to emerge (i.e., through new initiatives, roles and networks). By mobilising civic agency, it can, in certain favourable conditions, transform the running of the hub. In parallel, the collective agency held within R-Urban began to shape the neighbourhood's future development through small actions, sharing 'R-Urban expertise' and being involved as stakeholder within new spatial planning programmes (e.g., Poplar Green Futures). This form of civic agency is particularly significant when considering neighbourhood socio-spatial transformation. However, it is most difficult to empirically evidence, which outlines the speculative nature of this claim.

When considering individual agency for participants, I would argue it is most impactful when supporting learners to transform into pedagogic 'hosts'. The act of teaching demonstrates capabilities nurtured through the collective process of designing and learning, demonstrating confidence, skill, knowledge, and passion to teach others. This has implications for future civic pedagogues as creating opportunities, supporting learners and facilitating this transition is important in realising the 'achievement of agency'. Achieving agency also expands the opportunity to be mobilised towards collective actions; holding individual agency first is integral when looking towards future civic needs.

At a more intrinsic level, CP nurture 'potential agencies' through learning. These are mobilised within the everyday, through the altering of habits, and small acts of advocacy to neighbours and family. I would argue that situated and embodied civic pedagogies enable freedoms to appear through their co-production. Small steps in a personal journey towards achievement of agency, CP have a role in nurturing new capabilities by 'learning to act' towards more equitable urban and climate futures.

9.0 Thesis Conclusion and Contributions

9.1 Thesis Overview and Findings

This thesis set out to explore civic pedagogies in Critical Spatial Practice, aiming to 'extend' the field's theorisation through design. This materialised through the co-design and delivery of two civic pedagogies (Climate Companions 2022-23) in the neighbourhood of Poplar, East London. In doing so, it has developed new insights and learnings into the conditions which allow them to flourish by investigating the learning methods deployed, the spaces in which they were embedded, and the design practices which enabled them. It sought to address a research gap, the lack of citizen experience in pedagogic evaluation, by exploring the pedagogies' agentive potential on learners and their ability to nurture civic agency for socio-spatial transformations.

It took a practice-based research approach, being situated within an ecological hub of civic resilience, R-Urban Poplar. The author was embedded within this hub through ongoing design activism within the collective of public works. The thesis focuses on 'design-driven' civic pedagogies, given the authors' existing training and design practice, which centres citizen participation within the built environment. The following conclusion presents the key findings from the research and the new contributions to knowledge before outlining the limitations and recommendations for future research.

This is a thesis structured by design, following Nelson's (2013) PhD structure in which the thesis has three constituent parts: a literature review and methodology which theoretically and contextually grounds the existing practice (Part 1), a portfolio that documents the works and process, in this case the pedagogy (Part 2), and a discussion which analyses and evaluates the work within the defined critical context (Part 3). In this case, I have taken a literal approach to the thesis organisation and summarise the key findings from each part below:

9.2 Contextualising and Situating

Chapter 2: 'Grounding Civic Pedagogies' established the base of knowledge and theory for the study through a literature review and case analysis of Climate Care 2019-2021. This process helped define the core characteristics of civic pedagogies as a form of critical spatial practice (RQ1), which informed my subsequent action research. I argued that civic pedagogies are always situated by location (social context) and in their knowledge content in the spirit of feminist epistemology (Haraway 1988, Harding 1992). They build on the legacies of urban educators (Gruenewald 2003, Dobson 2006) in utilising the city as a classroom and way of raising consciousness through close observation of socio-spatial contexts. The case study highlighted the importance of pedagogies being embedded within urban learning forums (Mcfarlane 2011) that sit outside or on the edges of institutional bodies. They build on the legacies of critical pedagogues (Freire 1996 / c1970, hooks 1994, Giroux 2010) in removing barriers to knowledge, reducing hierarchies by un-learning, and recognising learning's transformative potential on subjectivities. These processes can support the building of local alliances (relational networks) and trans-territorial solidarities by replicating effective pedagogic tools across geographies. I make the case for the role of designers that centre an 'ethic of care' in mediating the pedagogies with diverse groups. Lastly and most significantly, the chapter argued that processes of civic learning could nurture agency, our ability to act otherwise (Giddens 1984, Kossak et al. 2010) in both individuals and collectives.

Chapter 3: 'Situating the Design Practice', framed my approach as a 'Critical Spatial Practice' (Rendell 2016) working with civic learning and participatory methods as a member of the public works design collective. The chapter then introduced the socio-spatial context of Poplar and contextualised the R-Urban Poplar eco-civic hub (2017-21), which hosted the trial pedagogies. Chapter 4: 'Positionality and Methodology', defined the approach through practice-based research, PAR and activist scholarship. Research data (interviews, auto-ethnographies, photos, drawings, films) were analysed through a constructivist grounded theory lens.

The research design proposed two trial curricula (Climate Companions), learnings from the first informing the second through a structured co-design process. This programme aimed to directly address the neighbourhood context of Poplar and the R-Urban hub on the topic of climate change, action and care.

9.3 Practice Portfolio: Climate Companions

Following Nelson's (2013) methodology for design and practice-based research, the thesis presents 'the practice' via portfolio. This 'documentation of the process' includes drawings, photography, auto-ethnographic diary entries, films and relational mappings to describe Climate Companions in the fullest sense. This process supported the 'back and forth' between data gathering and interpretation, transforming the pedagogies as they developed (Charmaz 2017). This iterative portfolio production supported the interpretation and triangulation of key themes with post-evaluation interview transcripts, ultimately informing the discussion. This is significant for design researchers working with practice-based PhDs; the iterative process of action, documentation, and reflection to inform further action was integral to the sense-making process. Alongside data gathered from participants through semi-structured interviews, the portfolio provides the empirical basis for the discussion chapters, supporting critical thinking throughout the process.

9.4 Extending Theories and Practices

The third part discusses four main areas of theory and practice that emerged through the research (Learning, Spaces, Design, and Agency). They answer RQ2: Which design tools, learning methods and spaces enable transformative civic learning? And RQ3: To what extent can design-driven civic pedagogies enable greater agency in learners? In what ways does it contribute to socio-spatial transformation?

Learning: Situated and Embodied Neighbourhood Pedagogies

More than half the workshops utilised hands-on, skills-based, ‘learning by doing’, engaging participants in new knowledges and skills for everyday life. This had a strong uptake due to their direct applicability in domestic settings and within family networks. Hands-on learning was more effective within group settings, supporting learners to overcome inhibitions to action and demystifying complex processes, which supports Lave and Wenger’s (1991) thinking on situated learning within communities of practice. In certain instances, the ‘un-learning’ of harmful everyday practices were centred on re-learning forgotten skills and sharing situated knowledge toward lower-impact living.

The second mode of learning was ‘from place’, which helped learners to explore individual subjectivities through experiences of the surrounding socio-spatial context. This neighbourhood framing helped learners to shift from individual to more civic concerns. Workshops explored the neighbourhood through different thematic lenses; they were effective in developing environmental empathy and understanding of nature-culture entanglements; this created stronger ties and deeper consciousness towards the neighbourhood of Poplar. This situated learning approach (geographically and socially) has significance for other pedagogues and practitioners who are seeking to engage communities in justice oriented urban transformations. The pedagogic tools documented within the Portfolio extend the methodological base for future critical spatial practitioners.

The third mode of learning identified was ‘through togetherness’, specifically, via performative methods that supported the formation of a caring community of practice. These performative pedagogies enabled ‘unusual alliances’ and ‘trans-local solidarities’ to flourish, creating an empathetic space in which relationalities can negotiate shared interpretations around neighbourhood (and climate) justice.

All three modes of learning utilise and valorise situated knowledge(s) through their practice. Climate Companions embraced ‘partiality’ by connecting with individual

subjectivities and experiences of the neighbourhood. In most cases, workshops focused on developing embodied understandings derived through sensory experience, whether by doing (hands-on), by exploring space, or in moments of collective performativity. The collective setting created a forum to valorise knowledge of experience and create a platform to share it with others. The pedagogies were most effective when knowledge acquired directly translated into learners' everyday settings within the home or by changing perceptions of the neighbourhood. This closeness to place and individual lived experiences highlights the potential for learner transformation in civic pedagogies.

Spaces: R-Urban Poplar is an Inclusive Civic Classroom

R-Urban acted as 'space of demonstration', providing a prototype for an 'alternative' urban space demonstrating low-impact living and socio-ecological transitions. In this case, the physical infrastructures (prototypes) provided a learning apparatus through proximity and engagement. These are living demonstrations of circular systems that create a dynamic learning environment in support of learning aims. Beyond their material condition, the hub demonstrates social infrastructures, through 'alternative' resource governance to share resources more equitably in cities. Removing such a pedagogy from this setting would have limited the ability to learn through observation, touch and participation in realising alternatives to everyday life.

The hub acts as a space of 'openness and freedom', which are two core principles of urban commons. This was partially through spatial openness and the ability of learners to freely explore the site as a 'playground for adults'. However, the 'openness' of the hub governance was more significant in this case. Situating the pedagogy within an urban common enabled the hub to remain porous to new commoners, diversifying reach, building new networks and creating opportunities for future involvement in the reproduction of the commons. By embedding civic pedagogies closely within urban commons, they create a productive co-dependency. It supported the R-Urban hub in remaining open as a collectively stewarded resource, inviting new civic learners to enter the informal governance of the hub, a method for ensuring threshold and boundary commons remain porous (Stavrides 2015, De Angelis 2017). Simultaneously, the hub's openness and freedom created a dynamic

learning environment where learners could situate themselves and learn by directly participating within the hub. This co-dependency has significance for practitioners and researchers seeking to amplify and support emergent urban commons. Civic pedagogies can be implemented as a process and method to support the reproduction of democratically stewarded urban resources, expanding their networks and nurturing social values and common knowledge for their future use.

R-Urban commoners demonstrated the ability to care for learners through small 'gestures' (Trogal 2012). The hub first supported learners by accommodating individual needs, providing hospitable welcomes, and setting a relaxed 'informal' learning environment. Care gestures help to build reciprocity, creating future possibilities for citizens to care with others. Alongside care, 'informality' (spatial and social) supports the inclusion of diverse audiences. The informality of the spatial setting reflects the casual learning approach (at your own pace/ for the sake of it); when combined, it enables the pedagogies to reach beyond 'usual suspects' to those who may not identify themselves as 'citizen activists'. This is partially the success of urban commons as civic classrooms for learning, their openness, informality, and care enable more inclusive neighbourhood learning.

Co-design: Creates New Responsibilities and Relations

In this case, co-design tools enabled a co-curatorial process. 'Discursive Dinners' enabled trust and relations to form between a diverse co-design steering group (primarily women from global majority backgrounds). The specific design setting helped to build social ties and supported the formation of a community of practice. Within this group, learning desires were collectively identified, opening up the pedagogies to local needs and urgencies. Equally important was the co-mapping method, bringing a focus on spatial learning at the scale of the neighbourhood and networking the programme with new groups and partners. I argue that having a process that is frequently punctuated by structured co-design workshops enables constant feedback loops and creates more inclusive and relevant learning programmes for participants. These specific co-design tools can be replicated in

any context and are not exclusively linked to the co-design of civic learning; they represent small methodological innovations that build on the established history of co-design.

Beyond co-design tools, the research explored the evolution of design roles throughout the programme. My capacity as a design-research-educator was integral in facilitating and mediating the process. From this experience, I would argue that critical spatial practitioners are well placed to lead on the co-creation of civic pedagogies, utilising their skills as collaborative curators, bringing 'expert design cultures' (Manzini 2015) and constantly supporting co-learners to take on new responsibilities. In this case, it became a significant moment to share responsibilities with a wider network of collaborators. In my role as project initiator, the ability to relinquish control and keep desire (Petrescu 2005) created unexpected and unplanned outcomes for the benefit of the pedagogic experience. This 'losing control' of the process, by sharing responsibilities for programme curation and facilitation with the co-design group, was partially facilitated by the opening-up of the R-Urban hub to new networks and citizens. It supported the co-design group's move from the periphery to the centre of decision-making within R-Urban. It shifted decision-making power towards the co-design group and created new responsibilities, which supported the transformation of the hub by diversifying the voices which steward it.

Agency: Nurturing Capabilities and Mobilising Collective Actions

The final discussion chapter explored the capacity for civic pedagogies to promote the formation of individual and civic agencies (RQ3) in three ways. First, it highlights the 'potential agency' the learning process nurtures. This is formed in the everyday lives of participants by altering habits through the acquisition of new skills and knowledge, before then advocating for low-impact living and sustainable practices within familial networks. This finding builds on Amartya Sen's (2001) notion of 'freedom' as the means and ends of development by nurturing our capability to act. In this case, civic pedagogies supported the group in first 'learning to act'

(Petrescu 2018) in everyday life, enabling freedoms to appear, with the potential for their transformation. Through this research, the concept of ‘capabilities’ for action emerged as central to questions of agency. Literature suggests that capability-based approaches have greater potential to empower others by nurturing and mobilising existing knowledges, skills and shared resources. This is an area of research and literature which requires further and deeper engagement in future research.

Beyond potential agency, the programme supported certain co-learners to become ‘hosts’ by sharing situated knowledges and skills with other learners. In these handful of instances, the act of ‘peer-teaching’ becomes the active manifestation of the capability to act. This demonstration of confidence, skill, and passion to teach others can be understood as what Biesta and Tedder (2007) framed as the ‘achievement of agency’ over the life course; for these few participants, the process was most empowering.

Moving past individual agency, the research highlights the role of the R-Urban in enabling civic agency to materialise. In our case, the hub was integral in learners moving beyond the self towards civically oriented interests. This was achieved through the expansion of R-Urban’s network, the ability of the hub to support new citizen-led initiatives (Teviot People’s Kitchen) and its capacity to support wider neighbourhood actions (Poplar Green Futures). Civic agency is realised over longer durations of time, far beyond the planned research timeframe, given the complexity and slowness of influencing urban transformations in the neighbourhood. Despite this, the hub remains essential in catalysing collective actions; it remains a space in which learners may act together.

9.5 New Contributions to Knowledge

In learning through action there are several findings which contribute new knowledge to this emergent discourse.

Co-dependency of Civic Pedagogies and Urban Commons

First, this study highlights the importance of urban commons as civic classrooms. R-Urban Poplar's (and other urban commons) open governance structures are integral to mobilising civic agency within the learning group. Without such spaces in neighbourhoods that enable further actions, the impact of any civic pedagogy is more limited and likely to focus on individual concerns rather than collective ones. Urban commons are equally active demonstrators of 'alternatives' to urban resource management, ecological and circular systems, and practice care ethics. By foregrounding these values, they create inclusive learning environments that can go further than institutional learning environments to reach diverse audiences and support learners towards achieving transformative agency.

In the literature review, I highlighted how many examples of civic pedagogies take place at the boundaries of institutions, e.g., within schools (Antaki 2019) or HE education (Morrow et al. 2020), or through the civic outreach of engaged universities (Butterworth and Lawrence, 2018); I would speculate they are more effective when embedded directly within urban commons (such as R-Urban). Their independence from academic institutions creates the freedom to act, to practice 'alternatives' and to support local needs more directly. This shift does not preclude academic research and resources from supporting civic learning; it does, however, shift the focus of the activity outside traditional learning pathways and highlights the importance of locally embedded civic classrooms that are equipped to host and support diverse groups of learners. This finding has significance for pedagogues, critical spatial practitioners and researchers working with urban commons. Civic pedagogies can be instrumentalised as a tool to increase urban commons porosity and diversity as collectively stewarded resources. By doing so, they create an inclusive setting which supports the expansion of commoning values in the neighbourhood. This research makes the case for co-designed civic pedagogies, with a strong emphasis

on neighbourhood socio-spatial transformation, as a way of expanding commons thinking to new citizens, groups and networks.

Co-Design Processes Enable Agency and Transformation

In the case of Climate Companions, the role of co-design(ers) was vital to the materialisation of agency and maximising pedagogic impact. Establishing a co-curation approach to the learning programmes enabled the inclusion of more diverse voices in response to specific learner and neighbourhood needs. It ultimately supported co-learners in nurturing their agentic capabilities. Co-design enabled the opening up of the R-Urban hub by supporting the formation of new initiatives, while also serving as a catalytic moment for learners to demonstrate the ‘achievement of agency’ (Biesta and Tedder 2007) by becoming pedagogic hosts. Although I believe this process could have been more effective and intensive than was realised, it is a reminder of the importance of co-design in collective learning processes. Systematic co-design tools and roles that share responsibilities within a community of practice can enhance inclusivity and embed the curriculum within a local culture. Climate Companions demonstrated a direct pathway for participants first to become co-designers, then co-learn, teach their peers, and ultimately mobilise their collective agency through the ongoing stewardship of R-Urban. These pathways enable the transformation of the hub by diversifying membership, and transform the individual learner by acquiring new capabilities, skills, and knowledge as a form of civic resilience.

Co-designing pedagogies, such as Climate Companions, requires the project initiator (and future civic pedagogues/design researchers) to relinquish control while keeping the project on track simultaneously, a paradoxical relationship that is well-suited to the skills of critical spatial practitioners. It requires a deep understanding of co-design methods, experience in education and spatial thinking at the scale of the neighbourhood. Bringing together these three characteristics, alongside an ethic of care and companionship for the co-learners who participate, can help to nurture empowering learning experiences in informal civic settings.

9.6 Limitations of the Study

Firstly, the findings partially rely on a limited study size (number of interviewees and co-designers) who self-selected to participate in the research. This was mainly due to resourcing constraints of the PhD process, as finding and then supporting citizen participants was no simple exercise. Despite this limitation, the participating citizen co-learners were culturally diverse, had no prior experience as formal teachers or designers and were majority women. This may highlight further research opportunities to understand better why civic and climate learning, in this case, was primarily women-led.

A major challenge in the process was in ‘letting go’ of the pre-determined research aims and the desire to engage in climate care and action directly. This is especially relevant to projects of emancipatory education, as project initiators need to be attentive to the group’s needs and avoid dictating certain ways of being or practising. It is essential to be mindful of this, as researchers can inadvertently reinforce power dynamics and imbalances. Being white, male and higher educated brings with it certain privileges that the co-design group did not share. I found it challenging to cede curatorial control of the pedagogies entirely, and perhaps on reflection, more power and direct responsibilities could have been shared with participants, which would have potentially been more empowering.

A further limitation was on the ongoing capacity for the design research to support citizen co-researchers in mobilising civic agency nurtured in the programme. Whilst there have been some clear follow-on initiatives (e.g., Teviot People’s Kitchen), the important time taken to articulate research findings has in some way forced me to step back from everyday labour within R-Urban. Whilst I see no easy solution to this challenge, pre-planning this follow-on stage beyond the pedagogic curriculum would have been prudent. This was overlooked during the co-design planning, as emphasis was on understanding learner needs rather than engaging with ideas of action and the capabilities required within the group to achieve this. Perhaps this also highlights a limitation of civic pedagogies in enabling local action: they are instead a

first step towards action, but further research processes should allocate resources, time, and knowledge to support newly formed groups in developing future projects and prototypes. Co-design could have continued after the CC programme delivery, bringing together this newly formed group to co-design neighbourhood actions. This would require far more extensive resourcing and was not possible within the one-year fieldwork period.

A significant limitation is the challenge for other researchers to replicate this study in different contexts, which limits the generalisability of the findings. The success of the CC programme was primarily due to the author's close pre-existing relations and trust with R-Urban members. Having these strong ties is 'half the work' in delivering deeply engaged research, where forming new communities of practice can be a slow process. Other postgraduate researchers would struggle to carry out similar research without these pre-established relations and the resources of the practice and hub at their disposal. Carrying out the study in collaboration with public works and R-Urban enabled a more extensive process, with more adequate resources to cover the costs of workshop facilitators' time, production, and promotion. Without the backing (and collective know-how) of the design collective, it would be a significant challenge to recreate these conditions.

Lastly, as a researcher, I've found it challenging to empirically evidence 'urban transformation' as an impact of the civic pedagogies. In this case, I've demonstrated expanded relational networks within the hub alongside further neighbourhood initiatives and outcomes which have links to Climate Companions. However, the research could be strengthened with a more substantial empirical basis for analysing neighbourhood transformations. One major challenge is comparative temporalities between short one-month pedagogies and slow urban transformations (over years and decades). Perhaps longitudinal studies over multiple years, in collaboration with civic organisations and neighbourhoods, would more effectively equate what 'impact' civic learning can have.

9.7 Recommendations for Future Research and Civic Pedagogues

Investigating how civic pedagogies and other radical learning approaches support wider civic activism would greatly support this emergent practice and further socio-ecological transitions across diverse contexts. In considering agency and transformation, it seems evident that a broader engagement with social change literature would support civic pedagogies in other contexts. In particular, I would recommend engaging with literature around 'prefigurative politics'. Derickson and Routledge (2015) argue in favour of political prefiguration in theorising 'action through doing' and creating alternative futures through the transformation of everyday practices (p.6). It is argued that prefiguration is integral to broader social justice movement building, as it operates in the present to actively transform political structures by realising alternatives (Maeckelbergh, 2011). I would argue that civic pedagogies (such as this one) contribute the knowledge, skills, and desire to create such alternatives. They are the gateway towards wider political awakening, acting first on the everyday (within the home or neighbourhood) before turning towards projects of wider systemic change. This will help articulate how civic pedagogies and critical spatial practice can achieve their inherent aim of just socio-spatial transformations in a meaningful way, and support the expansion of the practice.

Perhaps an immediate next step would be to conduct a comparative analysis of multiple urban commons which are engaged in civic learning. Or possibly more directly, to continue to develop civic pedagogies as a key action-research method in research which explores the intersection of civic participation, commoning and ecological urgencies. As outlined in this research, urban commons are the key spaces for radical civic learning; they can act as allies and hosts, but need resourcing and extending through research. This comparison may highlight the potential and limits of co-designed civic learning in nurturing agencies towards urban

transformations, it would allow projects to share pedagogic tools as an act of trans-local solidarity and support emergent communities of civic action. This would be most effective as a longitudinal study over many years, allowing temporalities and spatial transformations to unfold and be analysed.

For design researchers and critical spatial practitioners, I would make the following recommendations based on this experience. First, civic pedagogies should be embedded within urban commons or other existing spaces of civic activism. They are most effective within such diverse and open governance systems that enable learners to take on new responsibilities. Second, utilise co-design tools to expand the project ambitions and respond to local needs, as without this approach, the impact and ability to affect individual and collective agency would be hampered. Adopting this position entails a commitment to open-ended processes, relinquishing control and an adaptability to respond to local urgencies. This requires an ethic of care and deep commitment to the messy, entangled relationships of people and place; for these reasons I see critical spatial practitioners as key agents of transformative civic learning.

For researchers, activists, and pedagogues, this thesis has been a personal reminder of the capability of learning to transform subjectivities by 'learning to act' through companionship and care. Civic pedagogies can be supportive of wider justice-oriented and mission-led research. They have the capacity to enact change at the scale of neighbourhoods and individual lives. They can be an effective tool to expand the networks, capabilities, and knowledge for wider socio-spatial and ecological transformations.

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List of Illustrations

All figures are Author's own unless otherwise stated

- Figure 01 - Thesis Structure Diagram
- Figure 02 - Thesis Design Diagram
- Figure 03 - Floating University Berlin, Floating Site Infrastructures in 2018 opening.
- Figure 04 - The second spatial iteration for FUB in 2019.
Source: Floating e.V. Photographer: Lena Giovanazzi
- Figure 05 - Open Curatorial Design Approach, Climate Care Curriculum 2021.
Source: (Climate Care 2021 Programme, Soft Agency 2021)
- Figure 06 - Hands-on Composting Workshop Climate Care 2019
Source: Floating e.V. Photographer: Lena Giovanazzi
- Figure 07 - Water/Body Performance workshop Climate Care 2019.
Source: Floating e.V. Photographer: Lena Giovanazzi
- Figure 08 - Park Products 2003-4.
Source: public works
- Figure 09 - The Last Chair Arch 2014-15
Source: public works
- Figure 10 - School for Civic Action at Roskilde Music Festival 2016-19.
Source: public works
- Figure 11 - Tradeptford at the Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden.
Source: public works
- Figure 12 - LJ Works Official Opening 2023, the culmination of 9 years' work.
Source: public works
- Figure 13 - The rebuilding on Lansbury, 1951 Festival of Britain.
Source: Westergaard, J. et al. (1954, p.44)
- Figure 14 - The redevelopment of Balfron Tower, 2022
Source: The Guardian (2022) Photograph by: Jack Taylor/Getty Images
- Figure 15 - Building R-Urban Wick in the mobile city garden, 2015.
Source: public works
- Figure 16 - Arriving in Poplar as the R-Urban project, bringing baggage in 2017.
Source: public works
- Figure 17 - R-Urban Bagneux, Agrocite and Recyclab 2021,
Source: Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée
- Figure 18 - R-Urban Act Publication and Resilience Strategy, 2015.
Source: Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée and public works
- Figure 19 - 'Performing Digestion' participatory prototyping on site AD, 2019.
Source: public works
- Figure 20 - Moss Wall Boundary Fence Prototype 2020
Source: Author and public works
- Figure 21 - Companions Weekly workshop programme 2021-2024
Source: public works
- Figure 22 - Repairs Cafe Workshop programme 2022-24
Source: public works
- Figure 23 - Nelson's Practice-based arts research epistemological model
- Figure 24 - McIntyre's 'Recursive and cyclical process'
Source: McIntyre 2014
- Figure 25 - Research Methods Diagram
- Figure 26 - Research Design Diagram for Climate Companions
- Figure 28 - Practice Portfolio Reader
- Figure 29 - Ecological Cycles and Savings R-Urban Poplar 2022.
- Figure 30 - R-Urban Poplar Site Plan 2017
- Figure 31 - R-Urban Poplar 2017. The Arrival from Hackney Wick.
Source: public works
- Figure 32 - R-Urban Poplar Site Plan 2019.

Figure 33 - R-Urban Poplar Anaerobic Digester 2019
Source: public works

Figure 34 - R-Urban Poplar Site Plan 2021.

Figure 35 - R-Urban Poplar 2021 - Bangla Feast
Source: public works

Figure 36 - R-Urban Poplar Relationscape Mapping 2021

Figure 37 - R-Urban Poplar 2022 - Converted Garage Offices

Figure 38 - Computer building workshop

Figure 39 - Patchwork clothing repairs workshop

Figure 40 - Arriving in Poplar (2017). Enzo Mari Building workshop
Source: public works

Figure 41 - Summer School (2019) - Tower building workshop
Source: public works

Figure 42 - Situated Drawing, "Performing Digestion 2" Building an off-grid anaerobic digester 2019. Source: public works

Figure 43 - Insects, diseases and pests workshop (2021) Learning how to maximise plant health. Source: public works

Figure 44 - Compost club (2022) - Learning about maintaining and managing compost heaps
Source: public works

Figure 45 - Bangla Feast (2021) - Community cooking workshop with local chef host.
Source: public works

Figure 46 - Climate Companions Programme Flyer

Figure 47 - Open-call out via R-Urban mailing list

Figure 48 - Climate Companions 2022 Programme Analysis

Figure 49 - Wild Poplar - Learning about the Linden tree
Source: Nana Maolini

Figure 50 - Building moulds for Hempcrete and Mycelium Bricks
Source: Nana Maolini

Figure 51 - Space-use analysis for Eco-Build Workshop Programmes

Figure 52 - Co-making the formwork

Figure 53 - Mixing and tamping the hempcrete mix

Figure 54 - Hempcrete Block Mixes - increased lime and sand

Figure 55 - Mixing mushroom spores with hemp

Figure 56 - Hempcrete Block with Natural dyes (Indigo)

Figure 57 - Mycelium living bricks
Source: Marc Cowan

Figure 58 - Workshop attendee working on a wax candle natural dye relief print.

Figure 59 - Bangla Feast learning to make Bangladeshi delicacies with local produce

Figure 60 - Urri, bean plant and flowers from the garden tour

Figure 61 - Mr Naga and green chilli on the garden allotment tour with resident grower.

Figure 62 - Food growing and community meals

Figure 63 - Khodu curry, fresh samosa and pilau

Figure 64 - Testing out the Microphone Listening Devices

Figure 65 - Neighbourhood Foraging Walk exploring Langdon Park

Source: Nana Maolini

Figure 66 - Walking map of the 2 hour foraging walk

Figure 67- Picking crabapples from the neighbours tree

Source: Nana Maolini

Figure 68 - Fennel seed harvesting

Source: Nana Maolini

Figure 69 - Apple tree, harvesting cultivated apples from a street tree

Source: Nana Maolini

Figure 70 - Making hawberry ketchup with harvested bounty

Figure 71 - Learning from the Street(trees)

Source: Nana Maolini

Figure 72 - Natural dye printmaking for the communal tablecloth

Figure 73 - Naturally dyed fabric sample

Source: Nana Maolini

Figure 74 - Staining the communal table cloth with natural dyes

Figure 75 - Wax drawing for relief print

Figure 76 - Making paper bowls for the final feast

Figure 77 - Inspecting Moss samples gathered at R-Urban

Source: Nana Maolini

Figure 78 - The moss walking route, the walk was cut short by torrential rain

Figure 79- Leaving R-Urban towards the A12 motorway

Figure 80 - Workshop host introducing moss species

Figure 81 - In search of local mosses along A12

Figure 82 - Pincushion moss found on A12

Figure 83 - Inspecting R-Urban Soil Samples under the microscope

Source: Nana Maolini

Figure 84 - Soil web mapping

Figure 85 - Word association game with soil

Figure 86 - Investigating soil samples

Source: Nana Maolini

Figure 87 - Microbes, bacteria, fungi under microscope.

Source: Nana Maolini

Figure 88 - Seed Harvesting Expert showing growers around the garden plot

Source: Nana Maolini

Figure 89- R-Urban space analysis for the seed harvesting workshop

Figure 90 - Artichoke seed head

Figure 91 - Fermenting and harvesting tomato seeds

Figure 92 - Getting hands-on making seed bombs with wildflowers, compost and clay

Figure 93 - Seed bombs ready for neighbourhood distribution

Figure 94 - Learning how to stitch repair

Figure 95 - Starter course for the Discursive Dinner

Figure 96 - R-Urban space analysis, evolution of the dining setting

Figure 97 Exploring evolution of R-Urban by year

Figure 98 - Making connections and companionships

Figure 99 - An edible landscape, the companions digest

Figure 100 - Mapping possible futures for R-Urban

Figure 101 - Climate Companions 2022 Film Screenshot

Source: Vimeo, Nana Maolini

Figure 102 - Companions Digest, drawing the first programme to a conclusion.

Figure 103 - CC22 Film screening setup for the Co-Design workshop

Figure 104 - Place setting worksheets used to note ideas over dinner

Figure 105 - Participant learning desire mapping for the future programme

Figure 106 - Identifying particular skills to learn through CC23 programme

Figure 107 - Post-it mapping ideas for community actions

Figure 108 - An edible landscape for Discursive Dinner in CC22

Figure 109 - Co-Design Workshop preparation

Figure 110 - Co-Mapping resources and interests within the neighbourhood

Figure 111 - Identifying potential allies and collaborators for CC23 programme

Figure 112 - Promotional Programme flyer for CC23

Figure 113 - CC23 Programme Analysis

Figure 114 - Ending the green spaces walk at Langdon Park

Figure 115 - Plotting the greenspaces walking route

Figure 116 - B1. Love Green communal growing

Figure 117 - C1. Wildlife Pond built by Burcham Street Gardening group

Figure 118 - D1. Eclectic planting in 1x1m sq boxes at Greening Brownfield garden

Figure 119 - Getting hands-on and learning by mixing natural skincare remedies

Figure 120 - Noore leading an engaged workshop audience for the very first time

Figure 121 - The micro-containerised kitchen

Figure 122 - Enthusiastic citizen scientists conducting a bug hunt in the car park garden

Figure 123 - Zebra Spider found on a raised bed trough planter

Figure 124 - Wild pea growing in the green boundary at R-Urban

Figure 125 - People power, flower pressing the gathered samples for citizen science site survey

Figure 126 - Exploring the world under our feet, zooming in on more-than-human life.

Figure 127 - Wild foods neighbourhood walk

Figure 128 - Mapping the walking route

Figure 129 - Dune Berries 'A london surprise!' (an uncommon wild berry)

Figure 130 - Harvesting under ripe cherry for 'sour olives', prepared at R-Urban

Figure 131 - Harvest salad of wild flowers and leaves gathered during the walk

Figure 132 - Unlikely place for a healthy Dock plant, growing through the ballcourt fence

Figure 133 - Getting hands-on by mixing natural cleaning products to use at home

Figure 134 - Eka leading the fermentation workshop

Figure 135 - White banded bumblebee harvesting pollen from Nasturtiums in the garden

Figure 136 - Cutting planter templates from recycled lorry tarpaulin

Figure 137 - Participant herb box in situ at home

Figure 137.1 - Canoeing down the Limehouse Cut Canal

Source: public works

Figure 138 - Coots making nests in murky waters

Source: Nana Maolini

Figure 139 - Man-made nesting habitats

Source: Nana Maolini

Figure 140 - Photographing wildlife on the cut

Source: Nana Maolini

Figure 141 - Boiling spoilt milk to extra whey and curd

Source: public works

Figure 142 - Using bat detectors on dusk walk to locate bats

Figure 143 - Mapping the walking route

Figure 144 - Searching woodland habitats on Jolly's Green for bat activity

Figure 145 - Finally locating the bats in Langdon Park after dusk

Figure 146 - Understanding the life needs and make-up of the King Oyster mushroom

Figure 147 - King Oyster mushroom bucket recipe

Figure 148 - King Oyster Mushroom at 'pinning stage'

Figure 149 - Fully grown King Oyster mushrooms

Figure 150 - Starting with introductions and sharing everyone's favourite herb

Figure 151 - Learning how to naturally dye cotton fabrics

Figure 152 - World food cultures shared with others all lovingly prepared by participants

Figure 153 - CC23 Film Screenshot

Source: Vimeo, Nana Maolini

Figure 153.1 - R-Urban Poplar 2023

Source: public works, drawing by Cameron Bray

Figure 154 - R-Urban Poplar 2023

Figure 155 - R-Urban Poplar 2023

Figure 156 - R-Urban Poplar 2024

Figure 157 - R-Urban Poplar 2024

Figure 158 - Volunteer Garden Harvest 2024

Figure 159 - Fantastic foragable foods workshop, Bug Club 2024

Source: public works

Figure 160 - Nature listening devices workshop, Bug Club 2024

Source: public works

Figure 161 - Upcycling fabric waste into bags and plant pot holders

Source: public works

Figure 162 - Kintsugi Pottery Repairs

Source: public works

Figure 163 - Micro pond and bog habitats

Figure 164 - Kitchen greywater filtration reed beds

Figure 165 - Launch Event for TPK in May

Source: public works

Figure 166 - Aleya cooking Naan for TPK Bangla Feast

Figure 167 - R-Urban Relationscape 2024, mapping project networks

Figure 168 - Community green space bulb planting Autumn 2023

Source: public works

Figure 169 - GGE Field Trip to Hilldrop Farm

Source: public works

Figure 170 - Co-designing local food production at R-Urban Poplar

Source: public works

Figure 171 - Analysis of GGE report (accessible freely online), highlighting R-Urban stakeholder engagement in green space design

Source: public works

Figure 172 - Give and Gain exhibition banners

Figure 173 - Give and Gain exhibition banners 2

Figure 174 - R-Urban dried mushrooms in the relational economy of the site

Figure 175 - R-Urban compost, making new local economies from waste

Figure 176 - Table cloth details showing hub infrastructures

Figure 177 - Relational mapping of site and institutional stakeholders

Figure 178 - Booklet and zines which describe the multiple ecologies of R-Urban Poplar

Figure 179 - Situating the Poplar hub within the histories of R-Urban in Paris and Hackney Wick

Figure 180 - Table 01: Modes of Learning, Knowledge, and Theory during Climate Companions 2022 and 2023

Figure 181 - Sketch of Greywater system rebuild 2023.
Source: public works, sketch by Angharad Davies

Figure 182 - The finished kitchen greywater system in 2023

Figure 183 - Raised bed Wick growing system

Figure 184 - Compost Toilet (2024), Mural by Angharad Davies

Figure 185 - Space use for Seed Harvesting Workshop 2022

Figure 186 - 'Site Rules' for visitors at R-Urban (2024)

Figure 187 - ProSHARE Co-mapping workshop (2022)

Figure 188 - Individual learning needs and desires mapping during the discursive dinner

Figure 189 - Co-Mapping neighbourhood groups, potential allies and spaces of interest

Figure 190 - R-Urban Relationscape 2021

Figure 191 - R-Urban Relationscape 2024

Figure 192 - Co-Design groups changing roles within R-Urban

Data Availability Statement

In accordance with the UKRI Economic Social Research Council Open Data policy, fully anonymised interview transcripts and metadata can be accessed via the ORDA

<https://orda.shef.ac.uk/>

Belfield, A. (2025) 'Climate Companions: Research Data Package'. The University of Sheffield.

Appendix

A1. Participant Information Sheet - Interviewee



Participant Information Sheet

Research project title: Civic pedagogies: Situated learning for urban transformation

This is an ESRC funded PhD Research conducted by Andrew Belfield at the University of Sheffield, School of Architecture.

Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask me if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. I would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

Thank you for reading this.

1. What is the purpose of the study?

This research hypothesises that civic education has the potential to create empowered citizens, who can recognise their collective agency, to undertake urban transformation. Through practice-based PhD research in partnership with critical design practice public works, we aim to test this potential through new trial civic pedagogies.

Utilising Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodologies, the research will co-design, develop, test, and evaluate a new civic curriculum in the research context of Poplar, East London. Through cycles of action research, it aims to better understand the relationship between the spatial transformation of neighbourhoods (Poplar) and empowered citizen activists through a process of civic co-learning.

2. Why have I been chosen to take part?

You've been selected due to your participation in the Climate Care learning festival hosted at R-Urban Poplar in 2022. Your reflections on the experience of being a research participant in this process would greatly contribute towards answering the research hypothesis and help to inform future iterations of civic learning which will take place at R-urban in the future.

3. Do I have to take part?

Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without explanation and without incurring disadvantage.

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Principle Investigator
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4. What will happen if I take part?

You will be invited to a one-on-one interview with a research lead (Andrew Belfield) working as part of the Sheffield School of Architecture.

The interview will be approximately 40-50 minutes long and will be semi-structured with some prompting questions, but the participant is invited to reflect openly on their participation in the climate care civic curriculum.

The Participant will be invited to reflect on their involvement in the co-design and planning of the climate care festival and reflect on the experiences of being a co-learner in the workshops/activities hosted.

The participant will be encouraged to reflect on what skills or knowledge was learnt, and what impact that has had subsequently.

The participant will be invited to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum, to help inform future iterations of the civic curriculum.

5. Are there any risks in taking part?

Participating in the research is not anticipated to cause you any disadvantage or discomfort. No potential physical or psychological harm or distress is expected.

6. What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the research and wish to make a complaint, please contact Doina Petrescu; doina.petrescu@sheffield.ac.uk in the first instance. If you feel your complaint has not been handled in a satisfactory way you can contact the Head of the Department of School, Karim Hadjri k.hadjri@sheffield.ac.uk

If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>

7. Will my participation be kept confidential?

Any data collected will be anonymised to protect all participants personal data in accordance with GDPR and UK Data protection. Any data will be stored on encrypted University Laptops and will only be used for the purposes of research.

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8. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

Your answers will be recorded and analysed by the research team only, and all the records will be stored in a form protected by passwords or in a locked space.

9. What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?

The research wants to learn from individual experiences of the climate care festival, to better understand how civic learning takes place, what methods are used/work, what are the strengths and weaknesses of this educational approach, and how the experience has affected you beyond the workshop itself.

10. What will happen to the results of the research project?

Results of the research will be published in an academic context as part of Andrew's PhD research, this may involve publishing in academic journals.

11. Who is organising and funding the research?

The PhD is supported through PhD scholarship via the [White Rose Director Training Partnership](#) which is funded through the Economic Social Research Council (ESRC).

12. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

Yes, this project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Sheffield Ethics approval board.

13. What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

You can withdraw at anytime, without explanation.

14. Who can I contact if I have further questions?

Please see below contact details for research lead and supervisor.

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A2. Participant Information Sheet - Co-Design Workshop



Participant Information Sheet

Research project title: Civic pedagogies: Situated learning for urban transformation

This is an ESRC funded PhD Research conducted by Andrew Belfield at the University of Sheffield, School of Architecture.

Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask me if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. I would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

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Utilising Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodologies, the research will co-design, develop, test, and evaluate a new civic curriculum in the research context of Poplar, East London. Through cycles of action research, it aims to better understand the relationship between the spatial transformation of neighbourhoods (Poplar) and empowered citizen activists through a process of civic co-learning.

2. Why have I been chosen to take part?

You've been selected for the co-design workshops through conversations with our local partner public works, who recommended your involvement given your expertise in the local community and involvement in R-Urban Poplar project. Your interest in civic education and passion for climate resilience are also motivating factors for your selection as a research participant and we hope to work with you for this research process.

3. Do I have to take part?

Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without explanation and without incurring disadvantage.

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4. What will happen if I take part?

You will be invited to a series of co-design workshops in collaboration with public works and the R-Urban Poplar project.

Workshops are participatory and aimed to collectively co-design the curriculum needs which should be addressed based on a deep understanding of the local context and the theme of Climate care.

You'll be invited to work in a group with other participants in a workshop facilitated by the research lead, Andrew Belfield.

This will involve local needs mapping before determining thematic framework for the climate care learning festival, you will be asked to contribute to these group discussions.

5. Are there any risks in taking part?

Participating in the research is not anticipated to cause you any disadvantage or discomfort. No potential physical or psychological harm or distress is expected.

6. What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

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A3. Participant Consent Form



Civic pedagogies: Situated learning for urban transformation

Participant Consent Form

<i>Please tick the appropriate boxes</i>	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	☐	☐
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include the participation in:		
Semi-structured qualitative group interviews	☐	☐
Please be aware that photographs and video recording may be used during the Climate Care learning festival and used as project documentation. Please indicate below your preference for image use.	☐	☐
Yes - I am happy for the images and/or video to appear in the project documentation		
No - Please edit out any images and/or video in which I appear		
I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield.	☐	☐
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	☐	☐
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐
I give permission for the anonymised data (interview transcript) that I provide to be deposited in the University of Sheffield data repository (ORDA) so it can be used for future research and learning	☐	☐
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	☐	☐

Principle Investigator: Andrew Belfield – arbelfield1@sheffield.ac.uk

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Name of participant [printed]

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher [printed]

Signature

Date

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